

**Benefits, Challenges, and Limitations of Fair Trade as a Social Justice Movement**

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis answers some important questions about how Fair Trade is experienced and perceived by some Northern sellers, consumers, activists, advocates, practitioners, and an importer. As it relates to sellers, I focus only on small scale independent businesses (i.e. I do not include large corporate businesses in my interview sample). Fair Trade works to establish a dignified livelihood for many producers in the South. Some of the most important actors in the Fair Trade movement are the people who buy, sell, and/or advocate for Fair Trade in the North. Fair Trade is largely a consumer movement which relies on the purchase of Fair Trade products. Without consumers purchasing Fair Trade products, retailers providing the products for sale, and activists raising awareness of Fair Trade, the movement, as it is presently constituted, would be non-existent. This qualitative research is based on 19 in-depth interviews with nine interviewees involved with Fair Trade in Canada. I focus on benefits, challenges, and limitations of Fair Trade in the context of their involvement with it. I describe and analyze how people become involved with Fair Trade, what motivates them to do so, what they hope to achieve, and the benefits of being involved. I also describe and analyze how people understand and deal with any challenges and limitations associated with their involvement with Fair Trade. I also explore whether involvement with Fair Trade influences how people think about other products that they purchase and, if so, in what ways. I focus mainly on the commodity of coffee, but my discussion is not limited to this single commodity. Interviewees' experiences with and participation in Fair Trade vary in terms of their level of involvement and interest in the broader Fair Trade movement (as opposed to just participating in the market component). This research reveals that while Fair Trade is a small movement, sellers, consumers, and activists have had much success in the advancement of Fair Trade. While challenges have not deterred interviewees from continuing to participate in Fair Trade, analysis and explanation of such challenges provides the opportunity for Fair Trade practitioners to develop effective solutions in an effort to meet the needs of various Fair Trade actors.

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## Introduction

This thesis answers some important questions about how Fair Trade (FT)<sup>1</sup> is constituted, interpreted, and experienced by some Northern sellers, consumers, activists, advocates, practitioners, and an importer. As it relates to sellers, I focus only on small scale independent businesses (i.e. I do not include large corporate businesses in my interview sample). I highlight benefits, challenges, and limitations of being involved with FT. Interviewees' experiences with and participation in FT vary in terms of their level of involvement and interest in the broader FT movement (as opposed to just participating in the market component).

FT provides the opportunity for sellers of FT products to act as facilitators by providing the opportunity for consumers to have the "choice" of purchasing FT. The decision to sell FT coffee (as an option or exclusively) is inseparable from the need to remain profitable in order to stay in business. Some sellers' experiences with FT (and/or trading fairly) carries into their personal life (as consumers and/or activists), while for others, involvement with FT is confined to the business (they are not activists or consumers of FT products).

Interviewees' experiences with FT are reliant upon having the money, awareness, and access to be able to purchase FT commodities (however, in some instances cost does not appear to be a determining factor). Consumer demand and seller-initiative are linked, with consumers' action to encourage business to offer FT products having some success. However, some sellers

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<sup>1</sup> The only reason I use the acronym "FT" is in the interest of space limitations. (It is considered acceptable, however, among people involved with FT, to use the acronym). In chapter titles and headings I use the full phrase because it reads better. As well, when directly quoting and referencing authors and interviewees I use the full phrase as it appears in the original quote, instead of the acronym (unless they use it). Interviewees and referenced authors vary as it relates to capitalizing or not capitalizing "F" and "T" with some noting a preference. There appears to be a lack of consistency between various organizations, individuals, researchers, etcetera as it relates to capitalization. Capitalization appears to be one strategy aimed at distinguishing between certified FT and non-certified. I follow the protocol of the Canadian Fair Trade Network in relation to capitalization of "Fair Trade" to make it clear that I am referring to *certified* FT. As my thesis is based on the FT certified process and movement, the reader can assume, unless otherwise noted, that I am referring to *certified* FT.

are more inclined to see themselves as innovators who inform or educate consumers by bringing FT products to them (demonstrated by some sellers' statements that many customers do not care about FT or are largely unaware of it). Some sellers are simultaneously involved with FT as activists/practitioners and engage actively in various educational actions in order to promote FT because they strongly believe in the movement (while simultaneously benefiting financially). Others focus more on offering information about FT with a focus on "letting the consumer decide." There is a distinction between the perception of FT by interviewees as one based primarily on consumer demand or one based on seller-initiative (however, as one seller revealed, while she initially assumed that she was going to be the innovator, by bringing FT coffee to consumers, she soon learned that consumers were much more aware than she realized). I argue that the actions resulting from activists and consumer pressure can often be very influential in determining the course of social justice as it relates to personal consumption habits.

Some people involved with FT are also involved in other forms of socially conscious consumption and, in some instances, involvement with FT has influenced how they think and/or act as consumers.

This research reveals that while FT is a small movement, sellers, consumers, and activists have had much success in the advancement of FT. While challenges have not deterred interviewees from continuing to participate in FT, analysis and explanation of such challenges provides the opportunity for FT advocates to develop effective solutions in an effort to meet the needs of various FT actors.

While FT can only be understood as a partial and limited challenge to capitalism, the movement's focus on redistribution of profits, as opposed to accumulation, is an important challenge.



## Personal Positionality

I will briefly situate my personal stance on FT. I have embraced various strategies in my daily life in order to feel that I am making a contribution to social justice in the world, one of which is an engagement with FT through activism and the purchase of FT products. I always purchase FT coffee for home consumption and while in most cases I purchase the FT option of available products such as tea, chocolate, cocoa, sugar (and coffee when eating out), sometimes cost or unavailability prevents me from doing so. For instance, while at a conference in 2005, in which I took part in a session on FT, I purchased a cup of non-FT coffee because FT was unavailable. (Unlike me, a colleague decided against buying a coffee at all due to the unavailability). While I was quite unhappy that the coffee was not FT, my interest in drinking coffee prevailed. This highlights the contradictions that I have come to understand as part of living in a capitalist economy in which my actions as a consumer are sometimes incongruent with my ideals. While the never-ending struggle for social justice (encompassing many issues and taking a tremendous variety of forms) and subsequent achievements (which must be continuously struggled for) is typically neither easy nor swift; positive socially just changes do occur, due to action. Nonetheless, tremendous inequities associated with racism, gender, class, speciesism, age, and sexuality (to name some) often prevent desired aims from being realized.

I believe that FT is a *very* positive move in a 'good direction' and a more socially just system of exchange than dominant forms of trade labeled as 'free.' Amidst immense benefits and many successes, this movement faces some limitations and challenges, as do many social justice movements that conflict with dominant ideologies and structures. Noting limitations and challenges is part of the process of knowledge creation and provides the opportunity to examine how such limitations and challenges might be addressed through praxis.

My positionality stems from a concern for the workers who grow the coffee and many other products that people trade and consume. Many people struggle to receive a living wage for their product in their attempt to secure a livelihood. I am interested in examining how the interests of producers involved in FT are served or not served as the commodities that they produce flow through consumption and exchange in the North. The FT movement requires the participation of many people, organizations, and networks in order to work. The (supposed) primary beneficiaries of FT are the producers of FT products. As such, the success of the FT movement can really only be measured by ensuring that the workers who grow and harvest these products are satisfied with the aims of this initiative and that their needs are being met.<sup>2</sup>

While I wish to emphasize the tremendous value and significance of continued research on the FT movement from the perspective of producers, it is also certain that some of the most important actors in the FT movement are the people who buy, sell, and/or advocate for FT in the North. FT is largely a consumer movement which relies on the purchase of FT products. Without consumers purchasing FT products, retailers providing the products for sale, and activists raising awareness of FT, the movement, as it is presently constituted, would be non-existent. My qualitative research explores how consumers, sellers, advocates, and/or activists in the North experience and perceive the benefits, limits, and challenges of FT in the context of their involvement with it.

This research also explores how the FT movement and its affiliated consumable products may encourage positive social change as FT provides people with the opportunity to question why such an alternative (to Free Trade) exists and to think about the conditions of production and processes of trade of other products. If consumers, sellers, advocates, and activists involved

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<sup>2</sup> For research about the impact of FT from the perspective of producers see Moberg 2005; Hudson and Hudson 2004; Raynolds, Murray, and Taylor 2004; Murray, Raynolds, and Taylor 2003, for example.

with FT also question why other commodities are not produced in a socially just manner, the FT movement offers the potential to foster a discussion (and hopefully action) about changing such injustices. Hudson and Hudson (2003:424) maintain that:

If ... it [fair trade] is considered (and its proponents and practitioners consider it) as a single element in a broader movement to build a progressive transnational politics aimed at transforming the relations of production globally, fair trade can be understood as occupying a particularly strategic position. It has worked to establish transnational networks of solidarity between progressive political elements in the North and southern workers and is attempting to initiate a radical questioning of the dominant system of international trade.

As Hudson and Hudson (2003:427) explain further, “the information and the education provided through alternative trade needs to use the product as a gateway to exploring all of the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of production and consumption.”

### **Research Questions**

In line with the points discussed above, my research questions are:

1. How do people become involved with FT, what motivates them to do so, what do they hope to achieve, and what are the benefits of being involved?
2. How do people understand and deal with any challenges or limitations associated with their involvement with FT?
3. Does involvement with FT influence how people think about other products that they purchase? If so, how and in what way(s)?

### **Fair Trade Commodities**

I focused on coffee in this project as it is the first and “most widely available Fair Trade labeled commodity” (Raynolds et al. 2004:1110-1111). According to Levi and Linton (2003:409), “[a]s an export commodity, coffee is second only to petroleum.” In 1996, coffee

became the first available FT labeled product in Canada, and remains the predominant one (Harvard 2005). Of all of the certified FT coffee sold in Canada, upwards of 50% is certified organic and 70% is imported from Peru, Mexico, and Colombia (TransFair Canada 2005a). According to Raynolds et al. (2004:1110), "Fair Trade coffee is propelling the movement around the world and is responsible for much of the market's recent growth." I wanted to focus my research on a commodity that has such a huge impact.

While my focus on a specific commodity played a role in the development of the project and selection of interviewees in terms of sellers (i.e. people involved with businesses that sell coffee), this was not the case when I sought out advocates and activists involved with FT as it was assumed that they would be involved with FT products besides coffee. As well, I discovered that some sellers also retail FT products besides coffee. Interviewees' varied in their lists, but mentioned products such as: tea, sugar, cocoa, bananas, fresh fruit, rice, chocolate bars, hot chocolate, wine, soccer balls, juice, energy bars, flowers, and by-products which use FT products as ingredients (e.g. chocolate milk with FT cocoa). Interviewees' experiences with other FT products were important in order to gain a sense of their broader involvement with FT. Therefore, I did not confine interviews to a focus on coffee, but followed the lead of the interviewee in discussion of particular FT products. Considering the emphasis on coffee in the FT movement it is not surprising that coffee was the FT product that interviewees had the most experience with and primarily discussed.

As noted, I chose to interview people who are involved with FT in the North as consumers, sellers, activists, advocates, and an importer to get a sense of some of the complex issues that originate from such involvement with FT. This research is helpful because it offers

in-depth insight into the life experiences of how people incorporate FT into their lives and why they believe it is important.

Some interviewees sell all-FT coffee in their coffee shop (and in some cases other FT products) and are committed to the FT movement itself. Other interviewees offer FT coffee as an option. If sellers only include FT products as a choice this can potentially serve to highlight FT as 'just another product.' However, if consumer demand for FT is such that sellers are encouraged to provide more FT products, the movement will expand. A benefit of offering the choice of FT products is that consumers are provided with the option of purchasing such products. For instance, Jasmine was initially very resistant to the idea of providing FT coffee. However, she eventually offered it when consumer demand became so high that she no longer could refuse to do so. While this makes sense strategically and financially for Jasmine, as it keeps her customer base, it is also a benefit for the FT movement as more consumers are buying FT coffee and consumers are provided with a place where they can find the product. Perhaps this will also lead to consumers purchasing other FT products, when/if available, or encouraging businesses to offer additional FT products.

However, the decision of a business to include FT products in their offerings does not necessarily result in the expansion of the FT market in the sense of increased sales of FT products overall. Jasmine's customers told her that they were going elsewhere to purchase FT coffee and that they would buy it from her if she offered it. This indicates that customers may have simply changed the venue where they purchase FT coffee, as opposed to being a new consumer of FT coffee (i.e. expanding the FT market as a whole). This also reveals that the customers have more interest in FT than the seller. As Jasmine states, "I really only succumbed because my clients *really, really* said, 'This is something that we're going out of our way to buy

in some other place when we know that you could do it and maybe you want to revisit it.” This is one example of the variety of factors influencing the expansion and challenges of the FT movement and how those involved experience such issues.

This thesis will delve into a variety of issues regarding the benefits, challenges, and limitations of being involved with FT. Through detailing and analyzing the experiences and perspectives of interviewees and offering insight into their daily lives, I aim to highlight that these people are attempting to participate in social justice (i.e. do something ‘right’), as they navigate complications, frustrations, and inspirations.

Before proceeding I will offer a brief general introduction in order to establish the larger socio-historical context in which the FT movement began. A great many people are opposed to the injustices perpetuated by Free Trade and capitalist globalization (McNally 2002). Increasingly frustrated by the actions of the IMF, the WTO, and “the damages of market liberalization” people have resisted the desire to sit back idly while peoples’ lives are filled with suffering as a result of various international trade rules that benefit the rich at the expense of the poor (Grimes 2005:237). “In the search for viable alternatives to the monolithic draconian policies, a decentralized, grassroots citizen movement born some fifty years ago is burgeoning.” (237). Grimes (238) is referring to the fair trade movement, whose origins trace back to church organizations in the late 1940s. She (239) explains how the fair trade movement is connected to the wider anti-WTO movement by suggesting that:

Fair traders recognize the new world order in which the powers of government have shrunk as the unelected officials of the WTO, transnationals and financial speculators, have, for the most part, unfettered control of international production, trade, and financial flows. Thus fair traders believe it is up to citizens to create new enterprises which are based on sustainable global partnerships to meet the needs of society.

The FT movement is part of a broad movement that critiques, and does not accept, the policies set forth by powerful corporate interests that fail to place 'people before profit.' As Baird (2006:3) points out, "trade justice" activists are adamant that "international trade rules should be weighted in favour of poor people, not in favour of the rich world and its corporations." One of the key components of the FT movement is the importance of ensuring that producers' needs and interests are met. Quoting Sachs, the author ("Laboratory for Change" 2006:15) refers to a "fundamental differenc[e]" between the WTO and fair trade: "The WTO is about cheap prices. The welfare of the consumer is at the centre of this regime. With fair trade the producer is at the centre of attention; you start from there."

# Chapter One: Methodology

## Introduction

In this chapter I explain why I chose a critical research methodology, discuss the research sample and recruitment process, outline why I chose semi-structured interviewing as a form of data generation, describe the rationale for subsequent interviews, explain the ethics and interview process, and discuss the framework for analysis of interview data.

## Critical Research Methodology

A critical methodological approach implies that I have a strong interest in “understand[ing] not only people’s subjective feelings and experiences but also the material world and power relations within it” (Esterberg 2002:17). Ontologically, my position is one of historical realism, which implies that “virtual reality [is] shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values crystallized over time” (Lincoln and Guba 2002:168).<sup>3</sup> Harvey (1990:3) explains that critical methodology “involves an epistemological perspective in which knowledge and critique are intertwined.” In other words, knowledge is a verb, not a noun and we come to know the world through the active creation and continuous questioning of knowledge and information (Harvey 1990).

In regards to the choice of qualitative interviewing as a research method, my ontological position<sup>4</sup> is one that assumes that insights into research questions can be accessed by talking with people about their “knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions” (Mason 1996:39). Interviews with people involved with FT in the North provides

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase “virtual reality” implies that while “reality” exists and can be expressed/explained, “reality” can change, so in that sense it is “virtual” (i.e. it is likely not “the” reality forever, but it is “the” reality now).

<sup>4</sup> While I state that I have accessed the ideas/thoughts of interviewees, I recognize that these ideas may change over time.



valuable insights into how FT is perceived and experienced by such sellers, customers, activists, and/or advocates.

Epistemologically, my findings are “value-mediated” and “subjectivist” (Lincoln and Guba 2002:168). Throughout this project the subjectivities and values of both the interviewees and I influenced what questions were asked, as well as how they were asked and answered.

As a critical social researcher, I believe that research is a “moral and political” activity (Esterberg 2002:18). Such an approach is informed by a “call for action”; “interpretation” and “understanding” are not enough (Lincoln and Guba 2000:174). As Harvey (1990:32) explains:

Critical social research assumes that the world is changed by reflective practical activity and is thus not content to simply identify the nature of oppressive structures but to point to ways in which they can be combated through praxis.

It is my hope that this research will contribute to an understanding of some aspects of the FT movement related to benefits, challenges, and limitations and inform particular strategies and actions to be undertaken by those concerned about and involved with FT.

### **Research Sample**

The data generating technique for this research is qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth, informal interviews with people involved with FT as sellers, customers, advocates and/or activists. The focus during the interviews was to learn about the perspectives and experiences of interviewees.

Individuals were selected based on the fact that they are involved with FT as sellers, customers, advocates, and/or activists. Due to each interviewee’s allocation of time and effort to FT, I believe that I can reasonably argue that interviewees have thought through some of the benefits, challenges, and limitations of FT and being involved with it. However, as I discovered throughout the interview process, and will become clear throughout my analysis, there are

variations in interviewees' level of involvement. For instance, consider some examples of combinations of various interviewees' involvement. An interviewee can be: 1) solely a seller (while they may drink the FT coffee that they sell, their involvement with FT does not expand beyond the business and does not factor into personal consumption habits or FT activism); 2) a combination of an activist and a customer or; 3) a seller, customer, *and* activist (i.e. practitioner). The different roles that interviewees hold in relation to FT are important in terms of how they experience and engage with FT. My analysis will highlight similarities and differences between interviewees' perspectives and experiences.

I found out about sellers, customers, advocates and/or activists of FT through the following: 1) events related to FT; 2) information obtained at events; 3) Internet searches; 4) personal affiliation, e.g. someone within my personal network suggested that I contact a particular person and; 5) recommendations from interviewees.

The aim of this research is to explore, describe, and analyze the experiences and perspectives of the selected nine interviewees. The sample chosen for this research is non-representative and can be understood as a convenience sample (Palys 2003). I do not make generalizations about those involved in FT, beyond my sample. However, I do make some generalizations about FT itself with the assumption that any generalizations about FT must be seen as very tentative.

### **Recruitment of Interviewees**

I made initial contact with potential interviewees either in person, via telephone, or email and invited them to participate in an interview on their experience with and perspectives on FT as part of my thesis research which explores issues faced by sellers, customers, and/or advocates of FT. Each interviewee was provided with a Letter of Information (see Appendix) in person,

mail, or email (I provided a hard copy when we met) or a second party (i.e. in four instances the person I was interested in speaking with was not available when I arrived at a particular establishment so I left the Letter of Information with an employee to give to them). In one instance, I was given further contact information for the person I was interested in speaking with. In another instance, an employee whom I phoned directed me to a specific person within the same establishment that it would best for me to speak with and provided an email address. I followed up in order to find out whether potential interviewees were interested in participating and had received the Letter of Information.

Not all people who were contacted ended up taking part in the study. One person formally declined participation due to lack of time but kindly provided me with the names of some people who would likely be interested in my study. Another potential interviewee, who an interviewee had suggested I contact, was invited to participate via email but she did not respond and I am unsure as to whether the email was received. A business that was contacted did not respond. Also, I contacted two people who agreed to be interviewed but I did not end up doing so. One person was extremely busy and due to unforeseen circumstances cancelled our scheduled interview on two occasions, but was willing to schedule a third interview approximately a month and a half in the future. I suggested that I would contact her closer to that time. As I had conducted more interviews upon contacting her, I decided that it would be best to focus on the data that I had accumulated at that point and thanked her for her interest. Another person suggested that she would be available for a one hour interview. I thanked her for her willingness to participate but declined acceptance because some time had passed before we were in subsequent contact, I decided that I had generated enough data to work with, and I was interested in a lengthier interview.

In total, nine *people* (six men and three women) participated as interviewees. (As Jim and Donna participated in the interview together, their participation can in *some ways* be understood as *one respondent*, as in some instances, one of them was working or serving customers while I spoke with the other. I followed their lead in terms of this protocol).

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviewing, in contrast to a tightly structured approach, was a useful strategy for this research because I did not want to do too much to frame the agenda of the interview. However, throughout the interviews, I kept the conversation in line with the research objectives, as is indicative of a semi-structured format.

In-depth interviewing “involves actively listening to what your interviewee has to say, following up, and keeping the conversation rolling” (Esterberg 2002:103). The ‘flow’ and often the specific content of the interview varied with each respondent depending on the order of questions and particular concerns, experiences, and perspectives of each. Also, some of the main interview questions were not asked directly if the interviewee began to discuss the topic related to an interview question prior to me asking the question. In such cases, I used follow up questions and probes to find out more information. In semi-structured interviews, “the most important thing is to let participants speak, not to keep them rigidly on track” (Esterberg 2002:106).

The ability to gain rich data by following the lead of the interviewee is a large advantage of in-depth interviews as sometimes “the most important insights come from the spontaneous parts of interviews” (Esterberg 2002:106). However, such an approach is not without challenges. For instance, as the interviewer I had to: 1) determine when an interview had gone off-topic and; 2) guide the conversation back with a smooth transition; neither of which are a clear or easy task.

My research strategy was to find out about some of the benefits, challenges, and limitations of being involved with FT as experienced and perceived by interviewees, while allowing for emergent insights.

### **Rationale for Subsequent Interviews**

In subsequent interviews (a second interview with all participants, a third with three), I pursued specific points and in some cases, approached main topics/questions that had not been addressed in the first interview. Throughout these interviews I referred to a list of topics and questions that I prepared after a close reading of the transcript of the previous interview(s) conducted with the particular interviewee. While probes were utilized within initial interviews to learn about certain points, the ability to conduct subsequent interviews allowed me to have more time to reflect on the interview overall, as well as interviews with other respondents, in order to see certain commonalities and differences that it might be important to explore in more depth. Such interviews were a very important aspect of the research in order to gain deep insight and learn about the complexities of the social reality of people's lives.

I will cite two examples of how subsequent interviews provided the depth that I was in search of. As the analysis began before the total number of interviews was complete, I noted commonalities between interviewees' responses and thought about possible themes between various participants. This led me to the realization that many of the interviewees discussed the idea of "voting with your dollar." I asked interviewees about this in subsequent interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of this act, why it was important, and how it related to their experience with FT.

In other instances, a review of transcripts revealed a lack of clarity on some point and subsequent interviews were important for clearing up ambiguities (e.g. lack of commonality on

language) and providing more depth. For instance, as I had selected people who were involved with FT certified products, I was surprised to learn that some were also involved in other forms of trade that they considered “fair,” but which was not certified as FT. In the second interview I asked Donna and Jim to expand on their definition of “fairly traded” if a product is traded fairly [but without FT certification] and “Fair Trade” if it is certified. This distinction in conceptual terminology was important to learn more about it and alerted me to be more cognizant of a possible lack of commonality on language. As I reviewed and analyzed the transcripts I considered whether other interviewees’ use of such similar terms, as those noted above, carried distinct connotations or whether they used such terms interchangeably.

### **Ethics & Interview Process**

When people agreed to participate as an interviewee, we arranged a meeting place and/or set a time (i.e. for telephone interviews). In the first interview (or prior to the interview via mail for telephone interviews), interviewees were provided with a Written Consent Form (see Appendix), which detailed further information about the purpose of the research, procedures, and ethical concerns. All interviewees gave me permission to tape-record our conversations, which I transcribed. All interviewees were made aware that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, and that they did not have to respond to any questions that they did not wish to answer. Interviewees were also informed that they would be given a pseudonym in the thesis. Interviewees did not receive any compensation for taking part in the study. This research was approved by the Brock University Research Ethics Board on May 12, 2005 (see Appendix). The interviews took place between May 31, 2005 and early January 2006. Upon completion of interviews, all interviewees were provided with a Letter of Appreciation (see Appendix).

Prior to the first interview with each participant, I memorized the interview questions (see Appendix). Not having to refer constantly to a list of questions during the interview served to keep me engaged in the conversation and focused on following the lead of the interviewee. However, in subsequent interviews it was necessary and beneficial to keep close by a list of questions and points to probe for more information to ensure that I covered everything.

Interviewees were invited to participate in two (up to three) in-depth interviews lasting one to two hours each. While all respondents were interviewed twice, the length of time spent with each interviewee varied as the goal of the interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of each interviewee's experience with and perspective on FT (as opposed to spending the exact same amount of time with each). It may be important to note, however, that the average length of each interview was approximately one and a half hours (interviews ranged in length from half an hour to two and a half hours). I requested a third interview from four participants (three agreed, one did not respond to my requests). In total, 19 in-depth interviews constitute the data; 13 were face-to-face and six occurred over the telephone. In addition, I was in contact with five interviewees for brief telephone conversations and/or email to gain clarity or more information about specific points and all interviewees kindly took the time to answer my questions.

Interviews took place in various agreed upon locations such as within specific institutional settings (empty classrooms, offices, or meeting spaces), at the business establishment of the owner, or in a park.

While it is certain that face-to-face interviews offer an advantage in terms of the ability to "read" body language and facial cues (Rubin and Rubin 1995:141), for the purposes of this particular research project I decided that it was acceptable to conduct some of the interviews via telephone. In telephone interviews I paid attention to the tone of voice of the interviewee, which

is often a very good indication of how someone feels about a particular topic. A minor problem was the ability to determine what a silent pause meant. It was often not clear if the respondent was thinking about their response or had finished talking. It was easier to understand the meaning of silences through body language and facial cues in face-to-face interviews as opposed to telephone interviews.

At the beginning, during, and/or conclusion of the interview, interviewees asked me about various things such as how I became interested in researching FT (in which I often talked about the benefits and sometimes limits and concerns), how I found out about them, what *my* definition of “fair trade” is (this came up in the context of a distinction made by the interviewee between “fair trade” as a generic concept versus the definition of FT certification), if I am personally interested in FT or whether this thesis project is merely in order to get my MA, what my future plans are, what other interviewees had said, whether I was planning to interview myself, and who else I was interviewing (I did not reveal personal identities but merely referred generically to the roles of interviewees such as, sellers, activists, and/or customers).

### **Method of Analysis**

In line with the research questions outlined above, this project seeks to explore, describe, and critically analyze how and why people become involved with FT (i.e. the benefits of FT and involvement with it), some of the limitations and challenges associated with such involvement, and how or whether involvement with FT influences a consideration of the production, consumption, and/or exchange processes involved in other products that one purchases.

As Esterberg (2004:158) notes, qualitative analysis involves “focus[ing] on the potential meanings of your data.” Throughout the analysis, “[t]heory, data generation and data analysis are developed simultaneously in a dialectical process” (Mason 1996:141). Within the framework



of a critical methodological approach, “data are important in order to ground the enquiry but data must not be treated as independent of their socio-historic context” (Harvey 1990:8).

In order to analyze the data I read the transcripts, engaged in coding, and noted similar and distinct themes of views and experiences between interviewees. In relation to Esterberg’s (2004:161-2) advice, I developed a word processing document which included codes, themes and interview quotes that exemplified the code and/or theme. In some cases, I found it helpful to write memos while working through the analysis, which were incorporated into my final write-up if they proved useful (Esterberg 2004:164-6; Creswell 1998:143-144). I also utilized and found some aspects of the data analysis methods outlined by Kirby and McKenna (1989) and additional advice by Creswell (1998) to be particularly effective and helpful.

Due to the fact that extensive interview data was generated, it is impossible to give voice to everything. I give preference to particular issues which became prevalent through my analysis.

### **Some Methodological Challenges**

Utilizing a critical methodological approach during interviews presented some challenges which I had not anticipated. In striving to *understand, interpret, and learn* about the perspectives and experiences of interviewees, I often did not know when and how often it was appropriate to *critically engage* with interviewees (i.e. offer my opinion, challenge a comment, or voice my personal reservation, for instance). The role of interviewer often left me conflicted and wondering: How much detail is it important and appropriate to tell interviewees about my experiences, beliefs, and perspectives? How do I strike a balance between engaging with interviewees by reflecting on and offering information about my experiences, while also not spending so much time talking about myself that interviewees are left feeling frustrated that their

time is being wasted because they are not being given enough time to talk about what *they* think? (After all, the point of my research is to do interviews and learn about the perspectives and experience of people other than myself, not to engage in lengthy debates.) Is it best not to say too much about what I think because my perspective could potentially influence the response of interviewees? In light of such questions and concerns, as an interviewer I often erred on the side of talking very little about my experiences and while this has benefits, it also has drawbacks.

While I believe it is important as an interviewer to respond to questions posed by interviewees and strive to meaningfully answer such questions, I believe that it is important to keep the focus on listening to what the interviewee has to say and refrain from “jump[ing] in” with my own stories (Esterberg 2002:105). As such, there was inherent difficulty in recognizing that while part of my role as a researcher was to gain and understand information on people’s life experience, I also had the task of analytically evaluating such experiences within the context of the literature and my formulated argument, experience, and perspective. In some cases, my subsequent analysis (i.e. after the interview), led me to disagree with particular comments made by interviewees which I had not always voiced in the moment of the interview.

I began to learn how to strike a balance between too much information and not enough and also to understand that in sharing my perspectives a clearer understanding is gained. As such, I became more “open” towards the latter part of the interviewing process. (However, such openness was not *limited* to the later interviews). “Openness” refers to initiating my opinion on a topic when I had personal reservations about something an interviewee explained or when I felt it appropriate to highlight some of my specific stances and understandings, which sometimes conflicted with that of interviewees, and to hear what the interviewee had to say in response. For instance, I am very concerned about the higher cost of FT products and voiced my opinion to

some interviewees who noted how their stance was the same as and/or differed from mine. In such sharing, a clearer understanding of the perspective of interviewees was gained and I assume the reverse is true as well.

### *Correlation and Causation*

Part of my research was to find out how involvement with FT influences how people think about other products that they purchase (**Ch. Five**). However, in some cases when I thought I had clarified this, I realized in hindsight that perhaps I had not adequately confirmed the distinction between correlation and causation.<sup>5</sup> However, despite the fact that I was not able to determine whether some particular purchasing decision or thought process about personal consumption habits was as a *result of* one's involvement with FT, I *am* able to make a general argument about how or whether involvement with FT influences how people think about other products that they purchase, through analysis of examples that I was able to distinguish as causal, or not.

While it had seemed a perfectly laudable goal to attempt to isolate the specific practice of the purchase or sale of FT products and ask people about how it influences further thinking processes related to consumption, it became somewhat convoluted in the practice of the interview, in some instances.

### **Details on Interviewees' Involvement with Fair Trade<sup>6</sup>**

Nine people involved with FT as consumers, retailers, advocates, distributors, wholesalers, practitioners, activists, and an importer located in Canada were interviewed for this research. Some sellers are involved in the sale of *only* FT certified coffee. Others offer it as a choice among other types of coffee such as, conventionally traded coffee, coffee exchanged

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<sup>5</sup> Part of this was related to my attempt to not repeat questions that had previously been broached in conversation.

<sup>6</sup> All interviewees are located in Canada. In order to preserve anonymity, I do not refer to the specific areas where they are located.

outside the coffee commodities' market in a "fair" trading relationship, or coffee certified by other organizations. I asked partial-sellers (i.e. people who sell FT as an option) whether they are interested in switching to selling 100% FT certified coffee.

I asked customers when they first found out about FT and when they began to purchase FT certified products. I also asked sellers when they first began to sell FT certified coffee. I soon realized that these were difficult questions to answer in some cases. It is very difficult to recall the first time one purchased a FT product. I certainly cannot personally recall specifically in what year I made my first FT purchase. As well, some sellers had difficulty recalling the precise year, for certain, that they began to sell FT certified products (one looked up documentation, some gave a precise date, and some guessed).

All interviewees spoke of other certification and/or labeling programs that they are involved in such as organic, shade-grown, bird-friendly, ecological processing, Rainforest Alliance, and/or the Ethical Tea Partnership. The proliferation of various certification bodies is an important context in which to situate FT certification.

#### *List of Interviewees<sup>7</sup>*

*Haley* is the owner of a coffee establishment which opened in 2005 and she brews and sells *only* FT certified coffee (all of which is organic). She found out about FT coffee in 2001 when she went to a FT co-op during a visit to the country in Central America where she grew up. She is actively interested in the promotion of FT, has future plans of importing coffee directly (as opposed to buying from a Northern supplier), packaging her own brand of FT certified coffee which she will make available at a competitive price, and franchising her business. She has not personally seen other FT products in stores, except coffee, in one location. She located FT sugar,

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix for a brief summary of interviewees' roles in relation to Fair Trade; in table format.

tea, and chocolate online and recently received samples. She is looking into providing FT sugar for her customers to put in their drinks, making drinks with FT chocolate, and selling tea.

*Jim and Donna* roast, retail, wholesale, and import (one coffee is imported directly from coffee producers) only “fairly traded” coffee, some of which is FT certified. All of their coffee is certified organic and shade-grown. “[I]t *so* important to drink shade-grown coffee because it does make a huge difference and it’s providing habitat for all kinds of . . . birds and other animals” (Donna). In fact, Donna and Jim first approached their business from an environmental aspect with an intense interest in shade-grown coffee and protecting birds, “then we realized well, we can’t expect those people to be taking care of the birds if we aren’t taking care of them” (Donna). Jim explains that “the coffee that isn’t grown in shade is *really* bad for the environment. And that’s bad for the birds, it’s bad for the people, it’s good for the chemical companies.” (The benefits of shade-grown coffee are briefly discussed in **Ch. Two**). Jim notes:

we started *really* as more interested in coffee being shade-grown and because the shade-grown coffee . . . has the environmental impact of it. But, when you look at the broad environment then that also includes people and they must be paid well and I’ve *always* believed that the best thing to do to help along people in countries that are poorer is to actually buy products from them at reasonable prices so that they can make a living.

They are interested in having “a business that’s ethical and therefore treats everybody fairly. So, that’s part of why it [FT] came into the mix.” As for the percentage of their coffee that is FT, “probably about half the coffee we sell . . . it kinda varies, from time to time, we just got two new Fair Trade ones in . . . but about half of it or so is, certified. So, we’re *big* supporters of it” (Jim). While they do not “have a formal list of criteria” they likely will in the future, as it relates to their broader interest in “fairly traded” which at present requires that all of the coffee is:

certified organic and shade-grown and we need to have some assurances either directly or through whoever it is who’s importing it that the people are being treated fairly so I mean, that’s a big part of the Fair Trade thing, right? . . . well, it’s really *the* Fair Trade thing, but,

for example the coffee from [country in Central America] which can't be certified Fair Trade cause it's an estate, it's not a co-op. We know those people, we met them on three occasions . . . so I have some assurance that the whole thing is . . . legitimate, right and . . . really what we wanna do is have long-term relationships, either directly or indirectly, with people who are growing our coffee. And that way they know they can rely on us and we can rely on them and everybody grows together. . . . I need to have at least . . . some kind of assurance that people are getting paid for doing the work that they're doing and, we're not, child labour, and all that kind of stuff. . . the [South American country] coffee that we have, similar case, it's an estate, but . . . they have programs for health care for their workers and . . . housing and that kind of thing . . . and they pay above the standard wages, so I don't know personally whether that's enough right, and I don't *really* have any way of telling but as we are in the business longer we'll get a better sense of that and if we don't think it's right, we'll tell them and not that our 15 or 20 bags that we might buy o' that is gonna make a huge difference but we're out there, we're talking to people. . . . those are really the basic criteria.

"Fairly traded" also means that their coffee is bought directly from the farmer or the people they buy from buy directly from the farmers (i.e. the coffee does not go through the commodities market and the producers are paid the FT price [US\$1.41, including organic premium] or better). Effectively, whether FT certified or not they "pay at least the Fair Trade price" for all of their coffee. "[T]hroughout 2001-2002 we kind of got set up and then we started very slowly part-time in 2003. So, we've been roasting coffee in the back here since the end of 2002" (Jim). In 2004, they also began to sell chocolate products that are certified by another organization but which became FT certified in 2005.

*Ricki* is a micro-roaster, manufacturer, wholesaler, and retailer of gourmet coffee, some of which is FT certified (all is certified organic, some is shade-grown). Over the years his percentage of FT coffee has increased and as of October 2005, 75 to 80% of the coffee that he sells is FT certified. In 1998 he decided that he wanted to offer some FT coffee in his establishment and began researching how to do so. He became aware of FT via various sources and because he was interested in the benefits of FT for farmers he decided to become involved. As Ricki states, "I'm helping assist farmers to earn a better income level for them, a better

working environment, and then giving other people [individuals] the opportunity to participate in that as well. . . . it's very, very limited what we have in terms of our choices and our abilities to do that." My analysis also reveals that because of Ricki's statement: "what I've managed to do over the last decade is not stay current, but stay forward" and his belief that FT will become "mainstream" that this is part of the reason why he offers FT coffee. Also, Ricki participates in FT because he personally believes that it benefits the farmers. In 1999 he began sourcing and selling FT coffee and he explained that there was a "crossover of months" between when he began to sell the FT coffee *as* FT coffee in 2000. He will sell FT tea "soon."

*Jasmine* retails, wholesales, and roasts some FT certified coffee, all of which is certified organic<sup>8</sup>, (some is certified bird-friendly – but she does not market some of it). She began "with one [FT] coffee . . . and then we had two and now we have, I don't know, five or six, I mean, we *never* not have it." She also sells coffee that is not FT certified. She brought FT coffee into her store, "probably [in] 2000" because her customers were asking for it. She resisted selling FT coffee initially because she did not like the quality (i.e. taste) of it. She believes that it has only been in the "last couple of years that the product [FT coffee] quality is coming up," but she still does not think that some of it is "as good." However, she states that the quality standard has "become secondary to what's *more* important which is the need to help others there." She is in the process of waiting for the FT tea that she has ordered to arrive and is considering carrying FT cocoa and chocolate bars (perhaps towards Christmas or in a gift basket) but notes that such products do not sell well in her shop as people do not come into her shop in search of those products and they are sold in other places. Her customers inquire more about organic products than FT.

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<sup>8</sup> Unlike other sellers, *Jasmine* pointed out that all organic coffee *is* shade-grown (however, other interviewees disagree with this and maintain that there is a distinction between organic and shade certification).

*Martyn* is an activist and customer of FT certified products (and likes the combination of FT and organic) and is very interested in and committed to FT. In 2001, he learned about FT through his volunteer involvement with a non-governmental organization (NGO), became a member of a volunteer group involved in FT activism, and around this time began to purchase FT certified products. He became chair of the activist group in 2002. One of Martyn's main goals is to promote the FT certified logo as he believes it is the only guarantee that a product is FT: "If I don't see the [TransFair Canada] logo . . . I don't consider it Fair Trade."

*Jake* is involved in a business that imports, wholesales, distributes, and retails specialty coffee of which 90-95% is FT (exact percentage depends on the particular month and coffee harvests from various countries). He also sells certified organic, shade-grown and environmentally-friendly processed coffee. None of the coffee sold by their business is purchased through the commodity market as all coffee is imported directly from the country or from a "like-minded partner" in their importer network who imports "directly from the farm." Jake also sells coffee produced by farmers where FT is "not necessary" and in countries where FT "does not work", e.g. in a country in which FT certification is not possible. "When it's Fair Trade certified it's Fair Trade certified. Otherwise we just simply pay a fair price" (Jake). Even for the coffee which is not certified FT, they "always [pay] above" the FT floor price of US\$1.26/pound. For instance, in dealings with a particular co-op in Mexico that was in the process of getting on the FT Register and in need of some financial assistance, they paid US\$6/pound. Jake explains their fair price system (note that while the floor price for FT coffee that is organic under the FLO is US\$1.41, Jake's business pays above this price):

usually it's in increments of \$0.25 for every additional label but it's not a set rule . . . Fair Trade and organic you're likely paying . . . \$1.60, \$1.70, \$1.80. If it's Fair Trade, organic, shade . . . likely . . . \$1.80, \$1.90, \$2.00. In the case of our fully certified sustainable coffee [which includes FT, organic, shade, and environmentally friendly processing of the



coffee] we pay, last year, this last shipment about US\$2.30, so basically breaking it down in increments of 25 was to make it – the information understandable for a consumer. From the farmer’s perspective, they definitely know the further they go in the process the more that they get. So, and it’s done somewhat on a negotiation basis.

Jake explains that the FT certification process is beneficial for their business as it allows them to back up their business practices when consumers ask about the FT certification process.

In 1995, in the process of developing and setting up their business, they began importing FT coffee from an NGO. Jake states that “the economic driver was discovering that fresh coffee just simply wasn’t being sold anywhere in North America and we realized how much *better* fresh coffee was.” He explains: “*We* got into it [FT] just simply because we are *absolutely in love* with the environment and didn’t really in good conscience want to get into a business that we knew was exploitive to the farmers considering that we wanted to be sourcing the top quality coffees and *these* were the people that we would be sourcing from.” He found out about FT through a variety of formats: “Homework, research, exposure to specialty coffee industry in the early ‘90’s -- a number of the coffee congresses put on by the [name of organization focused on birds], a number of the specialty coffee conventions -- they [FT] were just simply part of the equation.” In 1997 they became the first people certified to import FT raw coffee beans in North America: “We pre-dated TransFair Canada and TransFair USA. There were no certified coffees in North America when we started.” Jake’s business began the actual purchase and sale of raw coffee beans in 2002. In 2004 they also began to sell roasted coffee. Ninety-eight percent of their coffee is sold at the same price. He plans to sell other products such as FT chocolate and tea; but is primarily interested in coffee industry.

*Simon* is an activist and customer of FT certified coffee (and likes to purchase organic FT products). He purchases “[e]very pound of coffee” for home consumption from Ten Thousand Villages. He also purchases FT chocolate (when he can and when it is available) and bought all

of his Christmas 2005 gifts from Ten Thousand Villages.<sup>9</sup> He states that he purchases the FT option of products: “As often as I can and I will go out of my way to do so.” In late 1998 and early 1999 Simon became involved with an NGO and learned about FT through this organization and began to purchase FT coffee in 1999-2000. During time spent in another country he purchased FT wine, coffee, tea and chocolate, all readily available there. Simon, an academic researcher and professor, identifies himself as a “critical social pedagogue” and a “public intellectual.”

*Jeremy* learned about FT when he began to work at a non-profit organization. As he explains: “I’ve basically been promoting fair trade<sup>10</sup> for about 17 or 18 years and at that time there was just basically . . . Ten Thousand Villages stores . . . also [name of company] selling really *bad* [in terms of taste] coffee.” He is co-founder of a worker cooperative and 100% of the coffee that they micro-roast is FT certified (also certified organic), which he describes as high quality and gourmet. Since 1998 they have been retailing and wholesaling coffee. They also retail FT tea, chocolate, and sugar. As a consumer, Jeremy explained that “when possible and available” FT products are his “first choice”, but that “convenience is part of life” and sometimes it is not always possible to purchase the FT option, when traveling, for instance. He identifies himself as a practitioner (activism is a component of it) as it relates to his role/involvement with FT, which is related to his belief in the importance of “praxis -- informed action.” Jeremy explains that his analysis is informed by the activist community but his actions go beyond activism in order to “creat[e] structures that are counter institutions to the things that we critique

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<sup>9</sup> (Ten Thousand Villages, which originated in 1946, is a non-profit and non-governmental alternative trading organization, affiliated with the Mennonite Central Committee. Ten Thousand Villages “provides vital, fair income to Third World people by marketing their handicrafts and telling their stories in North America” [Ten Thousand Villages N.d.]. The Mennonite Central Committee, originally called the Mennonite International Development Agency, “instigated the first direct-purchasing project with impoverished Latin American craftspeople” and lauded the importance of paying “a fair price to producers” (Waridel 2002:93)).

<sup>10</sup> I use the lowercase because FT certified products were not available in Canada at that time.

through our activism . . . they can sit within the landscape of the traditional business sector which often makes activists uncomfortable.” Jeremy speaks to various groups about FT, and related issues, and produces documentaries about farmers in the South who are part of FT coffee co-operatives.

## **Chapter Summary**

**Chapter One** has detailed the research methodology in depth. I discussed why I chose a critical research methodology; provided details on the research sample, recruitment, the semi-structured interview format, rationale for more than one interview/participant, ethics, the method of analysis and some methodological challenges. I also provided a summary of various aspects of each interviewee’s personal involvement with FT. **Chapter Two** begins by outlining my theoretical influences. I then proceed to situate the FT movement within a broader social and historical context. I describe and analyze the differences and similarities between FT coffee commodity networks and dominant Free Trade networks. I provide information about FT coffee certification standards, as well as analyze the benefits and difficulties that the FT movement encounters in a consumer-based capitalist society.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Theoretical Influences

My research was largely influenced by the structure vs. agency dilemma. Referring to Abrams and Giddens, Hale (1995:14) points to their insistence of thinking about human action in the context of “historical time.” Giddens (1979) and Abrams (1982) strive to bridge the gap between the structure and agency debate through recognizing that “human actions are shaped by prior human actions. Structures comprise actions taken collectively in the past. Actions produce structures for the future” (Hale 1995:14). I incorporate the issues of structure and agency by providing an analysis of how interviewees face challenges (i.e. structural barriers) in their agential advancement of Fair Trade. I also highlight how interviewees resist such structures in order to sell, consume, and advocate for Fair Trade.

I also utilize the theoretical lens of Marxism and political economy (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 2000:264); Hale 1995:21-26). For instance, I explain that the exploitative and destructive organization of capitalism heavily influences the extent to which Fair Trade coffee will become a norm or remain a limited market niche. I also analyze how the FT movement aims to connect consumers and producers which is tremendously important in order to challenge dominant forms of market exchange in which “commodity fetishism” prevails (Hudson and Hudson 2003). Citing Marx, Hudson and Hudson (415) state: “Commodity fetishism is the tendency, in a capitalist commodity system, for social relations between people to appear as a relationship between things.” They (414) suggest that “[a]lternative trade attempts to remove the veil obscuring these social relations, and though it must confront contradictions created by the capitalist organization of production and exchange, it offers a starting point for the erosion of commodity fetishism.” Finally, I also explain that while interviewees are agents in their

participation in Fair Trade, their actions are sometimes constrained by the present capitalist organization of the global economy, which, itself, exists due to the agency of actors in the past and present.

Social constructionism also influenced my research (Hale 1995:26-34, 528). I explore how interviewees, in their daily lives, actively create their social world (to a certain extent), and, in doing so, contribute to the development of present and future social structures, through their participation in Fair Trade. I also explore how interviewees socially construct and interpret Fair Trade in the context of their involvement with it.

The work of Karl Polanyi ([1944] 1964) also influenced my work. Until the development of the market economy, social relations between people were paramount and the economy was “embedded” in social organization (Polanyi 1964). The market economy is a distinct feature in human history because for the first time, social relations became an “accessory” of the economy. In relation to my thesis and Polanyi’s work, the Fair Trade movement recognizes that placing ‘profit before people’ is extremely problematic.

### **Situating Fair Trade as a Semi-Alternative to Free Trade: Two Systems of Coffee Production & Exchange within Capitalism**

#### *The Dominant System of Coffee Production & Exchange*

Capitalism plays a large role in producing many difficulties for people, severe enough to cause poverty, hunger, and death (to name a few atrocities). Such disgraceful outcomes are the result of gender, racial, ethnic, class, and geographic inequities (to name some), in which access to the necessities of life is not accorded to all people. According to Gindin and Stanford (2003:439) capitalism and free trade are incompatible with “democracy” and “equality”:

There seems to be a growing understanding – taught so well by capital itself – that free trade agreements are primarily about protecting property rights against any

democratic intervention, [and] that a deepening of democracy and equality are barriers to capital accumulation and therefore enemies of capitalism.

Free Trade, the dominant form of trade in the contemporary capitalist political economy, privileges profit over the interests of humans, animals, and the environment. In the context of a critique of the World Trade Organization (WTO), a call for “abolishing” it, and a highlighting of the limitations of ‘free markets’ and ‘free trade’, Sorenson (2003a:101) notes: “Rather than eliminating restrictions on trade, what is required are *more* regulations. These regulations should ensure the primacy of environmental protection, the promotion of human rights, and improvement in the conditions of life for oppressed and exploited groups.” Free market ideology proposes that “letting the market decide” will eventually ensure success for all which Jake eloquently denies: “what has been sacrificed is the people’s interest for the corporate interest. . . . this whole notion of laissez-faire, a free market economy’s gonna take care of everything is just a load of shit, obviously it’s failing quite badly.”

Economic anthropologist and historian, Karl Polanyi (1964) emphasizes that humans did not always conduct their daily lives in accordance with the realities of living in a capitalist society and economy as people must presently do in their attempt to “make it” on a daily basis in a social system that does not allow for all humans to reach their full potential or meet many basic needs. Polanyi maintains that work—the central activity of human existence—must be compatible with social organization. As social relations are currently secondary (or perhaps even less so) to economic profits, the production, exchange, and consumption of commodities occurs daily as the result of human activity, which is in most cases not under conditions of the worker’s own choosing.

Polanyi’s “double movement” thesis maintains that the push for profit accumulation in a market society can only be sustained for so long until humans are compelled to react by urging

that social relations and daily survival must be at the forefront of social and economic organization. The commodification of nature and labour has major ramifications for labourers who depend on commodities such as coffee beans in exchange for the commodity of money for their daily survival. Within a capitalist social structure, neoliberal ideology has the effect of perpetuating the belief that it is normal for humans to organize their lives around the accumulation of money and commodities and to be motivated by greed (Polanyi [1944] 1964).

The International Coffee Agreement (ICA), which was in place from 1962 until 1989, “was a set of international agreements that set production and consumption quotas and governed quality standards for most of the coffee industry” (Bacon 2005:498). According to Linton, Liou, and Shaw (2004:226), the United States and other coffee importing countries were supportive of the ICA because it was a way to keep the economies of Third World countries viable. However, this reasoning was not the result of altruism. Instead, the ICA was a tool in the struggle for containment and elimination of communism (Linton et al. 2004:226). The Marshall Plan dictated that it was necessary to “prevent economic deprivation” in the Third World because poverty would provide “fertile ground for communist agitation in Western Europe” (Linton et al. 2004:226).

The disintegration of the ICA was a momentous event that affected coffee producers worldwide as prices plummeted to “their lowest level in a hundred years” (Taylor 2005:132) and growers struggled to maintain their coffee growing operations and provide for their families (Raynolds, Murray, and Taylor 2004:1114; Levi and Linton 2003:407). As Raynolds et al. (2004:1114) point out, the collapse of the ICA was “exacerbated by neoliberal state cutbacks” while, at the same time, “the combination of market liberalization and increased coffee production coincid[ed] with high rates of transnational corporate concentration” (Bacon

2005:499). As a reaction to the fallout of the ICA, coffee producers began to produce more coffee, which “led to an increase in competition” and oversupply of coffee (Levi and Linton 2003:412).

Workers in 85 countries produce coffee (Rice 2001:39) and over 70% of global coffee production takes place on “small-scale family farms” in Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Bacon 2005:497). More than 130 million North Americans drink coffee (James 2000:191) and worldwide, the United States is the “largest coffee-consuming nation” (Levi and Linton 2003:410).

In the last few years, “coffee growers have found themselves in the worst crisis seen in the entire history of the sector” (Renard 2003:92). Commodity chain analysis of current conventional coffee exports reveals that roaster-distributors make a much larger share of the profit than do small producers (Taylor 2005:133; Levi and Linton 2003:410). For instance, while many coffee growers do not make enough money to cover the costs of production, corporate coffee roaster-distributors such as Kraft, Nestlé, Proctor & Gamble, and Sara Lee reap “unprecedented profits” (Taylor 2005:133). According to Bacon (2005:499), since the 1989 collapse of the ICA, “producers’ share of the final retail price has fallen substantially from 20% to 13%.” Hudson and Hudson (2004:135) point out that “the value of the world coffee economy in 1997 was U.S.\$30 billion,” while the countries that produced the coffee received approximately \$12 billion. Referencing Garratt (2002), Hudson and Hudson (2004:135) note more recent statistics which again reveal that coffee producing countries receive a very small proportion of the accumulated profit as the “total value” of the global coffee system is \$66 billion, while coffee producing countries receive only \$5.5 billion. Such statistics reveal the



increasing rich-poor gap; while the value of the commodity increases, the producers' share decreases.

According to Ponte (2002a:1105), the fallout of the ICA resulted in a shift in the "balance of power" such that coffee industry stakeholders in consuming countries currently hold a more dominant position than "farmers, local traders and producing country governments." As is to be expected this shift in power has resulted in a larger portion of profits being held in consuming countries (Ponte 2002a:1105). As will be discussed below, FT practices aim to re-direct some of this profit directly into the hands of farmers.

The use of land in conventional coffee production typically involves chemical pesticides and the clearing of large plots of land in order "to plant large and dense rows" of coffee beans that can be efficiently harvested to maintain low production costs (Levi and Linton 2003:409-410). Chemical fertilizers are used in large quantities and the "diversity of the agro-ecosystem" is compromised for profit (Hudson and Hudson 2004:139). Land is viewed as a commodity to be abused in the push for financial gain. However, "land is only another name for nature" and it is only with the introduction of market society that land came to be "fictitiously" understood as a commodity (Polanyi 1964:72). In a market society, nature (i.e. land and coffee plants), are subject to the whims of the market and treated as expendable and profitable resources.

#### *Fair Trade as a Semi-Alternative System of Coffee Production & Exchange*

Dominant neoliberal ideology and capitalist relations of production and exchange are challenged by those involved with FT coffee initiatives. FT is one part of the global struggle against capital accumulation and the limitations of a capitalist system to acknowledge and deal with the social sphere of daily life for struggling coffee farmers in the South. Why is FT necessary and important? How does it differ from Free Trade? When did FT labeling and

certification begin? What are the international standards followed by FT producers, retailers, and importers/traders?

One of the main benefits of the FT social movement lies in the fact that it provides a certain set of rules for international trade that are quite distinct from Free Trade. O'Hara and Stagl (2001:544) state that "[a]lternative movements are an expression of the eroding trust in established markets as well as in established institutions intended to curtail self-organizing markets and make them more accountable and trustworthy."

Coffee, the first labeled FT certified product, was launched in 1988 by the Max Havelaar Foundation based in the Netherlands (Max Havelaar Foundation 2005; Waridel 2002:95-97; Nicholls and Opal 2005:10). Various national initiatives (NIs) formed throughout the world following the Max Havelaar Foundation. For instance, TransFair International, which formed in 1992, is a non-profit labeling organization with initiatives in various countries (TransFair Germany N.d.). In 1997, the various national initiatives (NIs) formed the umbrella group Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO 2005a). FLO (2005b) "is the worldwide Fairtrade Standard setting and Certification organisation. It permits more than one million producers, workers and their dependants in 50 countries to benefit from labelled Fairtrade." At present, there are 20 NIs, located primarily in Europe and North America (FLO 2005c:5 ) but also Japan, Australia, and New Zealand (FLO 2005d).

Officially founded in 1994, TransFair Canada is FLO's Canadian NI (Waridel 2002:97). TransFair Canada is a "national non-profit certification and public education organization promoting Fair Trade Certified to improve the livelihood of developing world farmers and workers" (TransFair Canada 2004a). TransFair Canada (2005) certifies the following products as meeting the FT Standards as set out by FLO (however, not all products are available in every

province): coffee, tea, sugar, cocoa (which is used to make FT chocolate products), fresh fruit, sports balls, rice, quinoa, and cut flowers (cotton is planned as a future product). The volume of FT certified roasted coffee sold in Canada in 1998 was 21,626 kilograms. Sales volumes have increased annually and in 2004 940,000 kilograms were sold (TransFair Canada 2004b).

FLO outlines “generic producer standards” for: 1) small farmers and; 2) plantation and factory workers. Small farmers are “organised in cooperatives or other organisations with a democratic, participative structure.” The standards for plantation and factory workers “appl[y] to organised workers, whose employers pay decent wages, guarantee the right to join trade unions and provide good housing where relevant. On plantations and in factories, minimum health and safety as well as environmental standards must be complied with, and no child or forced labour may occur” (FLO 2005e).

Along with the generic guidelines, FLO also provides a list of standards specific to particular products. FT coffee production follows the “Generic Fairtrade Standards for Small Farmer’s Organisations” (FLO 2004). FT coffee production is dependent on small producers which are defined as “those that are not structurally dependent on permanent hired labour, managing their farm mainly with their own and their family’s labour-force” (FLO 2004).

The standards for FT production highlight the distinction between “minimum requirements” and “progress requirements”:

[a]s Fairtrade is also about development, the generic standards distinguish between *minimum* requirements, which producers must meet to be certified Fairtrade, and *progress* requirements that encourage producer organisations to continuously improve working conditions and product quality, to increase the environmental sustainability of their activities and to invest in the development of the organisations and their producers/workers (FLO 2005e).

It is “no small feat” (Raynolds 2000:298) that FT cooperatives, networks, and products presently exist, albeit the influence of FT products on the market is slight. FT represents only a miniscule portion of global trade with the total amount of FT products accounting for only 0.01% of trade worldwide (Hudson and Hudson 2003:423).

FT centers itself “around values of solidarity and fairness—contrary to relationships based on domination which prevail in market exchanges” (Renard 1999:496). As Taylor (2005:138) notes, “Fair Trade objects to the abstraction of the market as a depersonalized mechanism operating outside of social institutions and cultural values. It recognizes that economic activity is a social activity invested by humans with social and cultural meaning.” This quote is important as it lays bare the fundamental distinction between: 1) the conventional trade system that is concerned with profit accumulation and; 2) “fair” forms of production and exchange that privilege the social aspects (i.e. people), of coffee production.

FT attempts “to re-embed commodity circuits within . . . social relations” (i.e. shape the economy to fit a society that places people before profit) (Raynolds 2000:298). However, the notion of “commodity circuits” is not problematized. Rather, there is an emphasis within the movement of allowing coffee (commodified nature) farmers (commodified labour) access to the market (commodified money). While social organization and cohesion is given preference over the structure and function of the economy, FT is not an attempt to eradicate markets (Jaffee, Kloppenburg, and Monory 2004:192). Members of Comercio Justo México, FLO’s Mexican NI, explain that their vision “is about transforming the very purpose of markets, reordering them to benefit the most disadvantaged members of society” (Jaffee et al. 2004:184, 192). FT is a socially just trade relationship which insists that traders must:

- pay a price to producers that covers the costs of sustainable production and living;
  - pay a premium that producers can invest in development;
  - partially pay in advance, when producers ask for it;
  - sign contracts that allow for long-term planning and sustainable production practices.
- (FLO 2005e).

Coffee is the most prevalent agricultural FT product (Raynolds 2000:303) and it is produced predominantly in Latin American countries (Rice 2001:49). As of 2000, Mexico produced the largest amount of FT coffee, while Peru and Colombia were next in terms of quantity produced (Raynolds 2002b:416). Referring to the work of Fitter and Kaplinsky, Taylor (2005:132) notes that, in 2001, FT coffee “accounted for about 1% of total global coffee sales.”

FT prices are based on the premise that “prices are not the automatic product of depersonalized demand and supply forces,” as put forth by neoliberal market ideology (Taylor 2005:139). One of the benefits of becoming involved in the FT market is that when coffee proceeds through FT networks, growers are guaranteed a floor price. According to TransFair Canada (2006a), prices for FT products are determined as follows:

Fair Trade Certified prices are established by FLO International in collaboration with the various stakeholders such as the producer organizations. They are based on a combination of factors including the cost of production, cost of living, quality of the product and market prices. The costs of in-country transportation and exportation to consuming countries are also generally built into the minimum price.

*All* producers receive a FT premium of US\$0.05/pound of coffee in addition to the minimum price (FLO 2004:11).<sup>11</sup> The FT floor price differs depending on the “quality” of the bean which is determined based on the origin (i.e. regional location) of the coffee, whether the beans are

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<sup>11</sup> While importers must abide by the minimum price criteria as outlined above, they may decide to offer a price above the floor price (FLO 2004:10). If the market price for coffee (i.e. the New York or London coffee exchange) exceeds the FT floor price, the market price *becomes* the floor price for particular transactions that take place during that time (along with additional FT criteria as described above).

washed or unwashed, and whether the coffee is certified organic or not (FLO 2004:11).<sup>12</sup> It is my belief that such a “quality differential” (FLO 2004:11) and price difference is an unfortunate downside for growers who for particular reasons do not grow the higher quality bean, do not have access to facilities to wash the coffee beans, live in a specific region of the world, or cannot afford the fees involved in gaining organic certification.<sup>13</sup>

According to Raynolds (2002b:417), the floor price of FT coffee has “meant the difference between survival and bankruptcy for many small-scale coffee growers.” In the words of a coffee producer involved with FT in Mexico:

We have seen the prices paid to coffee growers in the region collapse. Everyone is leaving. We are able to keep producing because of the more favorable Fair Trade price. We are able to provide food and clothes for our families, even medicine. The children still attend school. We are not rich, but we are moving forward (quoted in Raynolds 2002b:417).

Conroy (2002:214) explains that producers involved in FT coffee benefit from access to advance payment upon request. This pre-payment option is in stark contrast to dominant forms of exchange whereby producers “are paid only if and when that coffee is eventually sold.” According to FLO (2004:11) producers may ask for “up to 60%” of the payment in advance. However, as can be expected, a pre-payment of this amount certainly creates difficulties for the importer. Referring to a 1998 interview with Bob Thomson of TransFair Canada, Rice (2001:60) notes that in order to deal with this problem, some importers agree to purchase a larger amount of the product if “the cooperative [does] *not* request all or any of it’s [*sic*] rightful pre-payment.”

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<sup>12</sup> While the minimum price paid per pound of coffee to producers of washed Arabica beans from Central America, Mexico, Africa, and Asia is US\$1.21 (US\$1.36 for certified organic; \$1.41 with premium), producers from South America and the Caribbean Area receive two cents less/pound. US\$1.19 (US\$1.34 for certified organic; US\$1.39 with premium) (FLO 2004:11). In the case of non-washed Arabica beans, the floor price is a standard US\$1.15, regardless of geographic location. In the case of Robusta beans, which many in the coffee industry describe as being of lower quality, the price per pound decreases to US\$1.05 (washed) and US\$1.01 (non-washed), regardless of geography (FLO 2004:11).

<sup>13</sup> In all instances, producers receive an additional US\$0.15/pound in addition to the floor price if the coffee is certified organic.

As Rice (2001:60) explains, “[s]uch conditions obviously place growers in the age-old situation of not having funds when they are most needed, and certainly go against the spirit of FT principles.”

For some producers, the benefits of FT involvement, such as the ability to provide for their families, would otherwise be impossible and would likely necessitate emigration in search of work (Taylor 2005:137). Other benefits have been attributed to FT involvement such as the use of the “social premium” provided by FT as a way to contribute to local community development projects (Taylor 2005:137). Taylor (2005:137) also notes that one of the “indirect benefits” of FT has been the “strengthening [of] farmers’ organizational capacity.” As well, “market contacts and greater understanding of international markets . . . [are] important in strengthening producer cooperative participation in organic, specialty coffee and other markets” (Murray et al. 2003:16).

The FT movement provides small-scale growers with the opportunity to practice sustainable coffee production. This can be seen as a partial attempt at socially re-embedding the economy because FT focuses on sustainable coffee plots that are not harmful to the natural environment. Preserving the environment is beneficial for the community. However, as discussed above, nature (i.e. land) is viewed as a commodity in market societies (Polanyi 1944:68-76). By necessity of operating in the current capitalist system, FT does not escape the conception of land and coffee beans as commodities to be produced and exchanged for money. Nonetheless, with FT coffee production, the focus on small-scale agriculture “is ecologically superior to capitalist, large-scale agriculture” (Hudson and Hudson 2004:138). Such large-scale plantations on which coffee is sun-grown lead to “soil degradation, genetic and species diversity loss, and pesticide poisoning of the land and water” (Hudson and Hudson 2004:139). “Due to

the degree of independence afforded by their cooperatives in conjunction with the fair trade movement, many indigenous campesinos [in Chiapas, Mexico] have been able to resist the introduction of sun-grown varieties and have opted instead to stay with the traditional shade system” (Hudson and Hudson 2004:140) which provides many environmental benefits.

### **Fees for Fair Trade Producers in the South and Licensees in the North**

Prior to 2004, certification fees were covered by Northern importers (Murray et al. 2003:21). In 2004, FLO began to charge producers a fee in order to become FT certified (Fairtrade Foundation 2005). On January 1, 2006, a “New Producer Certification Fee System” was implemented (FLO 2005f).

Businesses that process and/or package FT Certified products must be licensed by TransFair Canada and abide by the following criteria:

- Buy Fair Trade Certified ingredients from sources registered by TransFair Canada or FLO International.
- Maintain business processes that allow for the detailed tracking of quantities of Fair Trade Certified products purchased, processed and sold.
- Provide TransFair Canada with quarterly reports of purchases, processing and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
- Submit books to on-site audits by qualified inspectors.
- Use the Fair Trade Certified logo on products and marketing materials according to strict guidelines.
- Pay a license fee for each product which covers certification costs in Canada and helps finance the certification of producer organizations. (Direct words from TransFair Canada 2004d).

As of May 2006, TransFair Canada (2004e) lists 166 registered licensees of FT products and the list of “obligations of Canadian licensees” is as follows:

To become and remain licensed, companies selling products bearing the Fair Trade Certified logo must fulfill these requirements:

- If they sell conventional products in addition to Fair Trade Certified products, maintain business systems that distinguish between the two



- Report transactions with traders/producer organizations on a quarterly basis including payment of a set license fee per product in relation to sales for that quarter
- Submit to an audit of records
- Use the Fair Trade Certified logo according to norms designed to protect consumers (Direct words from TransFair Canada [2004f] website).

Businesses that retail, distribute, transport, or store FT certified products but do not process and/or package their own brand of a FT labeled product, do not require a licensing agreement with TransFair Canada, and as such, are not required to pay fees (2004g). For instance, while a business that processes coffee (by roasting it) and/or packages their own brand of it, requires a licensing agreement, a business that retails coffee that was roasted and packaged by a separate business is not required to pay fees to TransFair Canada (i.e. does not require a licensing agreement).

Businesses that import FT Certified products from “developing countries” must be licensed by TransFair Canada and abide by the following criteria:

- Buy from FLO Certified producer organizations.
- Pay Fair Trade Certified prices and premiums as defined in FLO Product Specific Standards.
- Provide pre-financing for contracts with small producer organizations, as defined in FLO General Trade Relationship Standards.
- Maintain business processes that allow for the detailed tracking of quantities of Fair Trade Certified products purchased, processed and sold.
- Provide detailed quarterly reports of purchases, processing and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
- Submit books to on-site audits by qualified inspectors.
- Pay a quarterly certification fee to finance international certification and trade auditing. (Direct words from TransFair Canada [2004h] website).

### **The Consumption of Fair Trade Coffee in a Consumer Society**

Quoting Billig, Wright (2004:665) notes that “. . . the pleasures of consumerism would be routinely diminished by an awareness of the productive origins of consumer goods.” Laure Waridel is President and Co-founder of Équiterre, an organization based in Quebec that

“develops projects that empower citizens to make environmentally and socially responsible choices” (Équiterre N.d.). Waridel is quoted in TransFair Canada’s 2004-5 Annual Report (2005a:16): “Every choice we make affects the environment and other people. We are always linked to thousands of men, women and children who grow the food that we eat, sew the clothes that we wear and make the products that we use. If the labels on these items enabled us to see these people, we would likely drastically change our shopping habits.” Waridel’s point exemplifies one of the core components of the FT movement: if people are informed they will act accordingly. People are encouraged to think about who produces the products that they consume.

Due to an interest in eliminating the façade which functions to hide the conditions of production, however, many consumers are interested in FT because of its focus on making the production and exchange process “transparent.” According to Moberg (2005:5-6), “Fair Trade is thus one manifestation of a longstanding form of market-based politics by which consumers organize their preferences to either promote progressive social change or to boycott economic entities implicated in social injustice.” Referring to the work of Polanyi, Raynolds (2000:299) points out that while relations of production and exchange within FT networks are “socially derived”, a major problem within capitalism is that “conventional market rules dis-embed commodities and trade from their true origins.” One of the limitations of FT products within a market system is that their “social qualities become subordinated to their price” (Raynolds 2000:299). According to Raynolds (2000:301) one way that FT has countered this tendency of dis-embedding has been through the creation of “new consumer/producer solidarity links” between Southern coffee producers and Northern coffee consumers. In doing so, “fair trade seeks to re-embed the production and marketing” of products (Raynolds 2000:301). With FT, it

is important that prices “reflect the social forces shaping the organization of production and consumption” (Taylor 2005:139).

According to Hans Bolscher, director of Max Havelaar, the FT movement owes much of its success to the consumer (Lappé and Lappé 2002:199). Bolscher explains that the FT movement began to focus on the role of the consumer after negotiations in the mid-1980s did not amount to any desire on the part of “CEOs of big food companies” to increase producers’ share of profits (quoted in Lappé and Lappé 2002:199). As Bolscher states, ‘A year of talk produced nothing. That’s when we realized we had to focus on consumers first. Without consumers willing to pay more, and without consumers putting pressure on companies, fair trade could never work’ (quoted in Lappé and Lappé 2002:199). As Lappé and Lappé (2002:208) explain, “[u]ltimately, it’s about getting consumers to mount enough pressure so corporations see there’s no choice: If they want our business, they must pay decent, living wages. In the process, we as a society create new norms of what is acceptable.” Levi and Linton (2003:419) maintain that “what they [FT supporters] are essentially trying to sell is the norm that people in prosperous countries should factor global social justice into their buying decisions.” As such, the main goal of the FT movement is “to make a lasting impact on society’s social values rather than to make a profit” (Levi and Linton 2003:419).

Partnering producers and consumers by emphasizing “‘trust’, ‘respect’ and ‘partnership’”, (Raynolds 2002b:410) may serve as a step toward socially re-embedding commodity production, exchange, and consumption. However, one of the main limitations of the FT movement is its heavy reliance on the consumer as an agent. As Taylor (2005:139) notes, “Fair Trade has aimed to re-personalize the market by creating personal ties between Northern consumers and Southern producers of coffee” (Taylor 2005:139), yet the FT movement’s

reliance on “ethical consumers” has “serious limitations” (Levi and Linton 2003:429). Fridell (2004a:153) maintains that “the network relies far too much on the whims of the market and the voluntary purchasing decisions of Northern consumers.” Consumers who are knowledgeable about FT and do purchase such products can only choose from an inadequate selection as there is presently a very limited variety of FT products available and this selection is only available in some locales. According to Raynolds (2000:306):

alternative trade initiatives [Fair Trade and organic] must go beyond the realm of consumer politics, where individuals with discretionary income make positive purchasing decisions, to the realm of citizen politics, where people make positive collective decisions about the nature of acceptable production and trade practices.

Hudson and Hudson (2003:427) maintain that:

Although it is true that fair trade reaches Northern consumers only in the sphere of exchange, this does not necessarily mean that it cannot start to foster a discussion about the conditions in which goods are produced that moves well beyond placating the guilty conscience of the well-to-do. The FLO’s [Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International] very visible commitment to owner-operated farms, cooperatives, and organic, shade grown coffee as a dramatic improvement over those that are large scale, capitalist, energy intensive, and sun grown could foster discussion about the social and environmental problems associated with capitalist production relations. Fair trade coffee does have the potential to function as a counter-hegemonic discourse, although as both we (and Johnston) have pointed out, this is far from inevitable given the demonstrated ability of capital to co-opt consumer movements.

Hudson and Hudson (2003:427), (see **Ch. One**), refer to the potential of FT products to act as a “gateway.” I believe that one of the benefits of FT is its possible role in acting as an agent of positive social change by encouraging a broader reflection on the process of production, consumption, and exchange. Similarly, while ideas are part of the process, but not sufficient in creating material change, it is hoped that such thinking translates into particular purchasing habits that are “ethical” (when various factors allow such an opportunity) or taking action to change particular processes of production and exchange that are socially unjust.

The FT movement's focus on consumerism is understandable in the current capitalist system where the purchase of products is a fundamental aspect of living and surviving. Through FT products, consumers are encouraged to exercise their political leanings in the arena of consumption. Referencing the work of Cenival (1998), Raynolds (2000:299) notes:

[a]s a market based movement, alternative trade in agriculture faces many of the pitfalls of other consumer movements. There is clearly a risk that alternative trade will lose its progressive thrust if the purchasing practices of self-interested wealthy consumers are permitted to guide the movement, undermining its democratic basis and re-enforcing the traditional subordination of Southern producers to the dictates of Northern consumers.

However, one of the main strategies of FT is to include detailed information on product packaging so that consumers can be knowledgeable about the conditions of production and exchange. Information on packaging is an important element of the educational aspect of the FT movement as it may lead consumers to question why the many other products that they purchase do not contain such information and possibly result in action aimed at labeling initiatives for other products.

The following quote by Giddens (1994:58) highlights the connectedness of the global economy, the role of personal consumption as it relates to purchasing products, and the far-reaching impacts that each purchasing decision has on the various individuals and institutions that have created the products that one consumes.

The day-to-day actions of an individual today are globally consequential. My decision to purchase a particular item of clothing, for example, or a particular foodstuff, has manifold global implications. It not only affects the livelihood of someone living on the other side of the world but may contribute to a process of ecological decay which itself has potential consequences for the whole of humanity. This extraordinary, and still accelerating, connectedness between everyday decisions and global outcomes, together with its reverse, the influence of global orders over individual life, forms the key subject-matter of the new agenda.

Giddens' point illustrates that our actions as consumers are not inconsequential.<sup>14</sup> Consumers who aim to change oppressive conditions for workers, such as inadequate wages or harsh labour situations under which many products are produced, soon discover that their choices are dependent on a wide range of factors which may include such things as available income, class position, and knowledge about the conditions of production for particular products. In terms of FT products, three of these factors are: 1) access to adequate information about FT (i.e. the ability and/or willingness to devote time to find out about what it is and why it is important); 2) the available income to purchase FT products and; 3) availability of FT products (which is based on the ability and/or willingness of businesses to access and provide FT products).

### **Fair Trade as Complicated by Capitalism's Contradictions**

Fraser (2001) distinguishes between "affirmative redistribution" and "transformative redistribution." "Affirmative redistribution", as Fraser (292) explains, "aims to redress economic injustice, [yet] it leaves intact the deep structures that generate class disadvantage. Thus it makes surface reallocations again and again." "Transformative redistribution", contrarily, is associated with socialist organizational models which aim to "redress unjust distribution by transforming the underlying political-economic structure" (Fraser 2001:292). Also of major importance, while "affirmative redistributive" models often result in "injustices of recognition" (292), "transformative redistribution" typically provides the opportunity to "redress some forms of misrecognition" (293).

FT highlights the maldistribution of profits accrued through the production, consumption, and exchange of specific commodities in favor of elites to the detriment of producers. In some

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<sup>14</sup> To Giddens' point that our purchasing decisions affect all humans, I would add that our purchases often have an impact on nonhuman animals and 'the environment.' As well, our purchases may not only impact people living "on the other side of the world", but also those residing more closely.

ways, FT can be understood as “affirmative redistribution” because while it allows for a more equitable distribution of profit, it does not radically alter the structure of the world capitalist system. This can be understood in the context of the fact that FT has been described as a system of trade that operates “in” as well as “against the market” (Brown 1993:156-176). FT must operate alongside multinational corporations that have a strong foothold in the dominant oppressive system of Free Trade. As Tétreault and Lipschutz (2005:69) point out, “fair trade focuses on changing the distribution of income along the commodity chain, not on the particular organization of global capitalism that gives so much power to the rich and so little to the poor.” FT’s strategy of focusing on a more equitable distribution of profits is a *very* positive aspect of this initiative. Yet, the lack of emphasis within FT discourse about the problems with capitalism, itself, as a social system of organization, can be understood as a substantial impediment of FT.

Such issues must be confronted in order to gain a broader understanding of the structure of the global capitalist economy. Consider the following point by Doane and West (2004:22) about the lack of emphasis within the FT movement on the inequalities inherent in the world system, such as the inability of producers to afford pesticides (hence the necessity of growing organic coffee as opposed to a desire to save the habitat of birds and promote ecological sustainability):

Consumers . . . are told that the high prices they pay for fair-traded coffee result in a better way of life for coffee farmers and an environmentally safer product, suggesting that consumption can be a charitable and world-improving act. Yet the consumer is not challenged to reflect upon the ways in which conditions of production are linked to the arrangements of the world market that these beneficiaries of the first world consumptive act link into a global market that demands a more natural coffee, with farmers who are essentially compelled to grow natural products as the benefits of modern technology (like noxious chemicals) are priced out of their range.

However, as pointed out by Hudson and Hudson (2004), FT challenges the capitalist relations of production in the South and in doing so, FT can be understood as “transformative

redistribution” (in line with the discussion of Fraser’s work, above). According to Hudson and Hudson (2004:130), “the potential of the fair trade movement lies in the fact that it addresses relations of exchange *and* relations of production.” Hudson and Hudson (2004:131) argue that:

fair trade manages to address issues of social justice and environmental sustainability in an integrated way. It does so by supporting a more equitable relationship of exchange between Northern consumers and Southern producers, and by supporting certain kinds of *productive relations* among Southern coffee farmers. By encouraging and helping to sustain noncapitalist forms of production, fair trade goes beyond the issue of “a fair price” for internationally traded goods. It enables a certain degree of autonomy for Southern producers in their decisions about the labor process, the governance of their communities and organizations, their strategies for meeting their subsistence needs, and their productive engagement with nature.

Similarly, Raynolds (2000:306) highlights the role of FT in challenging the capitalist production process and maintains that one of the beneficial results of FT has been its role in “countering the tendency to see conventional agro-food production and trade practices as inevitable.” Levi and Linton (2003:428-9) note that “[e]thical consumption campaigns are a promising means to achieve higher labor and environmental standards through a market mechanism.” Raynolds (2000:307) points out that, “what is needed is nothing short of a new system of global production and trade that prioritizes the needs of people and the environment over the dictates of free trade.” Raynolds (2000:298) believes that while the FT market “will presumably always be relatively small”, the movement is extremely important because of its role “in detailing the social conditions and costs of production.”

FT has the potential to be manipulated in a neoliberal market society to persuade consumers into believing that multinational corporations and institutions who sell and/or promote FT products are conducting trade and business transactions in a socially just manner (Fridell 2004a). The support of FT by corporations such as Proctor & Gamble and Sara Lee, and neoliberal institutions such as the World Bank must be examined very closely, argues Fridell



(2004a:154) as “[s]upport for fair trade by these neoliberal institutions amounts to them giving with one hand while they continue to take with another, significantly larger hand.” While it is important to be critical of and monitor the actions of corporations who offer a line of FT coffee alongside many non-FT coffees, it is also a positive achievement for producers involved in FT when corporations are pressured to respond to public demand by offering FT coffee.

Ransom (2005) is cautious about the success of FT and highlights that the movement’s mainstreaming strategies may hinder rather than propel the socially just aims. Ransom asks: if Fair Trade products are being sold by corporations such as Tesco and Starbucks, “who is to say what they will do with it [the Fair Trade label]?” (35). This is a very important question, indeed. As Renard (2003:93) notes:

If Starbucks were to withdraw from participation in the TransFair label, little would remain of the Fair Trade in the United States, where, unlike Europe, its introduction was not preceded by a large campaign to explain to consumers the meaning of the label and who certifies it, making attempts at deception easier.

FT is complicated by its location in the current social context of widespread non-state interventionism and deregulation. The FT network is “part of a general transformation in the international trade and development regime which has involved the decline of state intervention and market regulation and the rise of neoliberal political-economic agreements and NGO-led development projects” (Fridell 2004a:153). Mired in the context of non-governmental organizations fulfilling the “social welfare and development role once played by the state,” FT networks have emphasized “voluntarist, market-dependent, and member-specific” principles (Fridell 2004b:425-426).

Johnston’s (2002:44) analysis of FT discourse reveals the limitations of its “counter-hegemonic potential.” She outlines three main “troubling contradictions” of FT discourse: “[a]n

unquestioned support for consumer sovereignty; support for micro-lifestyle politics over politicised, public sphere awareness; and the normalisation of underdevelopment and over-consumption” (44). Central to Johnston’s analysis is her insistence on the problems with over-consumption. She maintains that instead of promoting a decrease in consumption, FT encourages people to consume “differently” (49). Johnston refers to the contradictions of living in a consumer society and turning to the sphere of consumerism in order to partake in resistance. As she points out, FT has “the potential to both challenge and accommodate the dominant ideology and practices of consumerism and neoliberal globalism” (54).

For producers who grow FT coffee, there is no guarantee that the cooperative will receive a FT price for the beans. Levi and Linton (2003:417) note that cooperatives are typically “only able to sell about half” of the coffee beans on the FT market and must resort to selling the remaining beans through the conventional market. In 1999, 60 million pounds of coffee were produced by FT co-operatives globally, yet they were only able to receive the FT price for 30 million pounds (Hudson and Hudson 2003:423). According to Jake (interviewee) despite the benefit of poverty-reduction, the impact of FT on the global coffee market as a whole, is slight. Jake suggests that only “ten percent” of all coffee farmers are registered with FLO and “less than one percent” of the coffee produced by the FT farmers is actually sold as FT certified coffee. Martyn (interviewee) states that “a typical Fair Trade farm only sells twenty, thirty percent to a Fair Trade importer.”

Presently, only three cooperatives are able to sell all of their coffee through FT networks: 1) UCIRI (in Mexico); 2) Majomut (in Mexico) and; 3) La Voz (in Guatemala) (Murray et al. 2003:16). Martyn states: “there’s *very few* . . . co-operatives that sell a hundred percent of their coffee to the FT market. There’s maybe two. There’s one in . . . Chiapas

which has been around for a long time so they manage to sell all their coffee Fair Trade.”

According to Taylor (2005:137), “FLO estimates that Fair Trade export capacity in Latin America, Africa, and Asia is roughly seven times greater than current demand.” The ceiling of the FT market reveals the limitations of the movement if it aims to make global exchange of coffee socially just (Murray et al. 2003:15). Consumers and sellers must be willing and able to pay more for their coffee in order for this ceiling to be eliminated. As Hudson and Hudson (2004:142) note, FT “offers some relief for producers connected to alternative trade networks, but the size of the consumer market for fair trade coffee presents a serious limit.”

While maintaining a positive outlook about FT coffee’s ability to expand its market share, Linton et al. (2004:241) are certain that “Fair Trade is not the solution to the global coffee crisis,” which is the result of oversupply of coffee. FT cannot address the oversupply problem as this is a problem that must be looked at more broadly. As Linton et al. (2004:241) argue, larger problems such as “poor countries’ reliance on a few export commodities” must be addressed. Significantly, one “objective[e]” of FT is “diversifications of production, in order to diminish dependency on one single product as a cash crop” (Hudson and Hudson 2004:137).

Hudson and Hudson (2004:142) point to the fact that “fair trade is not capable of dealing with the difficulties associated at the macro level with exporting primary products. In fact, it does not even attempt to do so.” However, they point out this does not necessarily imply that FT cannot help dramatically alter the current economic system. They (142) suggest that “[o]ne could envision a role for fair trade in facilitating a broader process of economic transformation (toward local production for local need, for example), but this represents potential, rather than current practice.”

## Chapter Summary

In line with the points noted above (Raynolds 2000; Levi and Linton 2003), and in line with the argument of Hudson and Hudson (2004) I argue that FT is part of the on-going discussion and positive action concerning the problems with production, distribution, exchange, and consumption and is *also* part of the process of challenging capitalist exploitation (in the Marxist sense), as it challenges “relations of production.” I argue that FT plays an important role in contributing to a more socially just world. FT provides producers in the South with numerous benefits, as noted above and below, which otherwise would be non-existent. As well, FT is part of a process of recognizing the connections within the global human community. FT advertising and networking relies to a large extent on highlighting the connection between consumers in the North and producers in the South. However, FT is part of a broader movement which maintains the importance of an international perspective and global social justice. As Simon notes, “[t]he local community is six billion people in my mind” (i.e. he believes in the importance of recognizing the “globalized community” and the fact that all humans are “connected”).

The Canadian Fair Trade Network (CFTN) highlights FT’s global focus: “All social justice and environmental sustainability movements are one and the same, they envision a just and sustainable future for all people and the planet” (CFTN 2004). The message is summarized as: “one movement, one struggle, many faces” (CFTN 2004). The CFTN’s message is extremely important because it points to justice as a goal and notes the positive contribution of FT to such a struggle. However, this message is somewhat problematic due to the fact that it simplifies the many particularities of and differences between numerous ongoing struggles and movements and definitions of “social justice” and “sustainability.”

This chapter began by outlining my theoretical influences after which I provided an overview and analysis of some of the literature as it relates to the FT movement. I described and analyzed the distinction between dominant Free Trade and alternative FT coffee exchanges, noting the benefits of FT in contrast to Free Trade as well and alluding to some similarities between the two. I provided details about the FT certification standards and regulations for Southern producers and Northern businesses; analyzed the issue of the consumption of FT coffee in a consumer society and; explored how FT is complicated by capitalism's contradictions. In **Chapter Three**, I begin my data analysis in which I highlight and analyze (issues related to the) benefits of FT, and involvement (with it, from the perspective) of various actors in the North.

## Chapter Three: Benefits of Fair Trade

This chapter highlights and analyzes some of the benefits of FT and of being involved with it from the perspective of Northern consumers, retailers, advocates, distributors, wholesalers, practitioners, activists, and an importer. This chapter addresses my first research question: How do people become involved with FT, what motivates them to do so, what do they hope to achieve, and what are the benefits of being involved?<sup>15</sup>

I discuss beneficial aspects of FT such as: why it is worthwhile to be involved with FT; the ability to sell FT products provides the opportunity for sellers to act as facilitators of social justice; the ability of consumers to exercise agency in an ethical way; the opportunity for the FT market and movement to expand; the “mainstream” status of organic certification with FT as a friendly-partner; trust in the certification process provided by FT organizations; FT’s ability to reduce the poverty of producers in the South; the democratic co-operative structure of FT producer groups; FT’s focus on connecting consumers and producers through relationships; connections, community, co-operation, and competition; FT and the local community; networking and dialoguing with TransFair Canada; FT as “trade not aid”; the tangible and immediate ability to create positive change through the purchase of FT products; the recognition of one’s privileged social location confirming one’s responsibility to participate in initiatives such as FT and; the absence of child labour.

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<sup>15</sup> However, while I have separated my analysis into two separate chapters in terms of ‘benefits’ and ‘challenges and limitations,’ the two are in some ways inter-connected because some interviewees’ perceived benefits of FT are others’ perceived limitations or challenges.

## Fair Trade: Why is it Worthwhile to Be Involved?

One of the main purposes of this research is to explore why people find it worthwhile to be involved with FT. There are many interests and/or activities that people can spend their time pursuing, so, why participate in FT? My analysis reveals that many interviewees' involvement with FT is a way for them to take part in something that matters. Involvement with FT allows people who are frustrated with the way the world is operating to take a stand and to support something important. Capitalist society can lead to people feeling a sense of "alienation." Referring to political economic theory, Hale (1995:24) states: "People experience alienation when they feel powerless to control central aspects of their lives, such as . . . when they are forced into work that is demeaning or meaningless to them." While presently involved in the sale of FT products, Haley, Donna, and Jim previously had different careers. Haley worked for a company for 10 years and always wanted to own her own business, but in doing so, she wanted to make sure that she was "helping others." Haley's involvement with FT makes her much happier than her previous job:

I wanted to be doing something that I felt *good* about myself . . . now, I'm working like *very* hard. . . . but I'm happy. . . . I'm 40 -- so I kinda reached a time in my life where I don't wanna work for the money, I wanna find something that makes me happy, makes me feel that I'm doing something good. Well, people get a little surprised when I tell them that I left an \$80,000 job (laughs). They look at me like, "Are you crazy?!" But, I don't know if it's part of my middle age crisis or what it is but I wanna do something that makes me happy.

Upon deciding to start her own business, she was reminded of past trip to Central America in which she met people who were members of a FT co-op. Also, due to having some "connections" with people involved with FT coffee in a Central American country, she decided that the business of FT coffee was "a good thing to get into." She is excited that she is able to raise awareness of FT in Canada; a country, in her perception that has a reputation of "helping

others”: “I *do truly believe that it’s very important* that people should be aware of these social issues in the whole world. And I do find that here in Canada people *do* care. I love Canada.” She believes that “so many people” in Canada are familiar with FT because of the country’s multi-culturalism and involvement in “social issues.”

Jim and Donna<sup>16</sup> are now able to meet their preference of “working closer to home and doing something in the community and not traveling.” Participation as a seller of FT certified coffee is one component of their ‘new lives.’ Jim explains that they “were looking for a company to start . . . discovered coffee and that fresh coffee was good coffee and we had wanted to do something that had more of an environmental aspect than the careers that we were involved in before.” This new situation is very satisfactory: “in the previous life I spent all day doing something that mattered not at all and this way . . . I can spend all day on something that matters” (Donna). Jim states that they “get a tremendous amount of satisfaction from getting people to switch to something sustainable from unsustainable.” They are unsure as to whether their business will be successful for the long-term but find that it is “much more satisfying knowing that you’re helping other people and helping the environment as opposed to hurting it – you’re actually making it a little bit better as opposed to a little bit worse every day” (Jim). Donna argues that “now it’s up to everybody else who either will or won’t [support their business] but it’s not gonna be because I didn’t put in the effort.” However, Donna and Jim point out that FT certification “is *really* more, that . . . it has a certain market recognition which is useful for us.” While they believe that FT is a “good” program and are happy that Southern producers are benefiting from it, the FT certification process is less important than personally

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<sup>16</sup> I asked Donna and Jim, in general, why it is worthwhile “to spend their time doing this” as I thought this was the best way to approach their broad interest in “fairly traded”, of which FT is one component.



having trusting relationships in which they know producers are benefiting, which is why they are involved in initiatives *besides* FT.

The issue of connectedness between people all over the world and the importance of treating people in Southern countries with respect and facilitating their opportunity to have a dignified life was suggested by many interviewees as to why it is worthwhile for them to be involved with FT. I asked about why it is worthwhile to be involved specifically with FT for NA and Donna and Jim state: "to give a very specific example of the coffee -- we're connected, right? So our environment is connected to their environment." They refer to the importance of respecting migratory birds, the environment, and people. Jim firmly believes that "coffee is going to be the last refuge for wild animals in many of those countries" and that an increase in the amount of shade-grown coffee will provide more places for the animals to live. Jim and Donna refer to the immense joy they experience when the coffee producers tell them that the orioles left on their migration route and they soon begin to see orioles in their neighborhood. Jim states: "*I've never in my life* had an example where that's happened, right? Jim also states: "I think for North Americans, I think Fair Trade is a good start. I think it could be better. I think that people should buy more fairly traded goods, whether it's TransFair certified or otherwise." Donna explained that "it's not necessarily worthwhile [for NA to take part in FT], but it's required." They stated that FT coffee will not "save our birds" but that as consumers and sellers they personally choose to purchase products that do contribute to the preservation of bird and animal habitat, which is related to the other certification initiatives that they are involved in and their overall approach of "fairly traded" with a focus on "sustainability." As Donna states: "We're not gonna keep seeing the birds come back if we keep buyin' Tim Horton's coffee. Cause they're already at half [bird population] where they were in 1960."

Many interviewees emphasize that it is unacceptable to treat people in Southern countries with disrespect. “*Morally*, I think it’s -- to trade fairly is the only way -- I mean I don’t see why we as a rich, white country should be sittin’ here tellin’ these people that they can’t *ever* have a decent standard of living. . . . it’s worth it [to take part in FT] because we are all connected”

(Jim). The perspective that people in the South deserve to be treated with respect is exemplified by Jake’s comment as to why FT is important and worthwhile:

it just comes down to whether or not you believe in whether a Western country should be treating developing countries as equals or whether we should just simply offload all of our crap . . . onto them and not care that they’re -- don’t have enough food on their table or clean water to drink or that they’re breeding out of control and there’s no medical facilities. It’s just ethical choice.

For Jeremy, there are three main things that make FT worthwhile and beneficial: “reconnecting people to products and [people to] other people . . . re-developing that face to face relationship. The second is this idea of . . . truly valuing what things are worth. . . . third thing is this idea of democracy, both economic democracy and governance of communities and organizations that is democratic and from the ground up basically.” Jeremy explains that one of the benefits of FT *is* the fact it provides people with challenges as it provides a new way to think. Jeremy explains that FT provides an opportunity to participate concretely in an action, e.g. the purchase of FT coffee. He points to the importance of engaging in positive initiatives that contribute to a better world in order to push away feelings of frustration with the current problems in the world and he is personally invested in “working towards a world that has social justice as a . . . standard.”

Jeremy offers the following powerful statement:

If you’re interested in social justice and . . . ecological sustainability and you aspire to . . . live in a world that isn’t as brutal as the one we currently live in then you have to incorporate the means of changing the world in your everyday actions. . . . one because it’s good practice and it’s good to experiment. I think the other thing is that so that you don’t go nuts ‘cause I think the world we live in is one that can easily drive you mad and it’s a

way of . . . realizing that you can participate to a certain extent in economics for example in a way that isn't brutalizing people all the time and that can be positive . . . I've got these values that have been informed by a lot of research a lot of meeting people, a lot of learning from people in the South and people here and a reflection on history and so when you sort of accumulate that unfortunate body of knowledge in your head and you're honest to yourself then you have to do something, right?

Following along with the theme that participation in FT provides a sense of taking part in something that matters, Simon explains why he finds it important to participate in FT:

What I'm interested in seeing in the rest of my journey in the world is people surviving with dignity, healthcare, education, enough to eat, enough to drink, not dying from malnutrition and diseases related to poverty before their fifth birthday. . . . I think twenty, forty, a hundred years from now people will look back and wonder how it was that . . . all the people that are living and breathing now today could possibly live with themselves watching 30,000 babies die everyday. Those issues are connected to what I do, to what I buy, to who I am in this community and they're connected to the research that I do on behalf of children and children's rights and very much a part of the reason why I agreed to this interview.

Simon emphasizes his ideas about the power of individual agency as well as his hope for the future: "Things look bad but I *can't not be hopeful* that they could change. I don't know how to do that. In fact, I am hopeful that it can change because I'm participating in creating those conditions myself. It's not even hope anymore, it's what I've seen in results that I've produced myself." Simon maintains the importance of taking action in line with his beliefs: "Fair Trade *allows me to behave* in a way that supports social justice. The day that all nations engage in Fair Trade, hmm, many people suggest that's utopianism, I don't agree with that, even idealism I've thrown out, it's certainly optimistic and I'll *own* being an optimist." Simon has witnessed and taken part in actions that confirm his belief that "small" amounts of influence can lead to profound change as time progresses. He emphasizes the importance of Buckminster Fuller's conceptual understanding of "trim-tabling." Simon explained that, in practice, trim-tabling refers to changing the direction of a large ship by slight, as opposed to abrupt, adjustments.

Conceptually, “trim-tapping” involves recognizing that “a small amount of leverage, or lobbying, or pressure, or even a one-to-one in the right place changes history” (Simon).

Many interviewees continue to be involved with FT because of their belief in the importance of playing a role as a contributor to social justice. Insistence that FT is worthwhile, means that challenges are easily brushed aside for some interviewees: “so what, routine, from colleagues. . . . the whole notion that it’s just neoliberal do-gooders, or feel-good and . . . that’s one of the most interesting challenges to me that colleagues, particularly researchers that are interested in oppression, oppressive practices to do with race, gender, class, . . . have not chosen to be activists because of the sense of whatever neoliberalism represents” (Simon). He was also “shocked and amazed” by the fact that the student population at his workplace were resistant to the idea of FT and voted against it. Simon points out the significance of our actions:

There are other structural approaches that we need to be aware of and each event that we impact change with has other changes that often were unintended and sometimes they’re negative. So, I wouldn’t expect that buying coffee from only growers in fairly traded organizations wouldn’t have some sort of downside but I don’t know what it is. I haven’t heard of it yet and I’m not naïve enough to think that it’s not likely to have some sort of negative impact.

He does not presently see a downside to FT and states: that he is “informed to some degree in some of these issues and I can’t see one. It might just be my ignorance. On the other hand, as I say, it just seems that absolute poverty is stupid.”

As highlighted in this section, the active participation of interviewees in FT, combined with resultant successes and positive feelings of contributing to a better world, have enabled people to feel that participating in FT is worthwhile. Martyn became involved with FT through volunteer activism and it has greatly enhanced his life for the better as opposed to when he was simply donating money: “to be involved is a lot more satisfying, it’s spiritually more satisfying than not knowing what you do when you give some money. And I’m hoping that it will

continue. In what shape or form it depends.” He explains that FT has broadened his “horizons of understanding . . . and dealing with the world in a different way. . . . a lot of personal growth and no regrets.”

FT is “something my clients wanted so it’s something I’m involved in because it brings people into my store”, explains Jasmine. She explains further: “I’m in business. I sell what sells and what my clients want. That’s [FT] what they want.” However, she is also supportive of the social justice aims of FT and believes “that once you’ve established that you can make enough money it is also your responsibility socially to give back”:

I never got to where I’m at on my own--a *lot* of people helped me get here so I look at it as it’s my turn to give back so what ways am I gonna do that? One of the ways we do it is through like [name of organization] which helps through the [items] to children in Third World countries but because Fair Trade coffee is – is *so directly involved with what I do – I mean we are coffee . . .* it would really be very silly of me not to consider it as a really viable part of my business. I mean, everybody who comes in asks *more and more*. “Do you carry Fair Trade coffee?” So, the word is out. (Jasmine)

However, Jasmine explains: “I don’t have a problem sleeping at night. I give back in *lots* of different ways to like, *lots* of different people all the time . . . I didn’t feel guilty not carrying it [FT coffee].” While she thinks FT is important, she does not think it is the only important organization and believes “it’s up to every individual to recognize that they can contribute. . . . I don’t think it’s fair to say that . . . Fair Trade is an organization that’s more worthwhile supporting than another. I think it just comes down to the individual and . . . making an effort to support *something* that will make a difference. There are a lot of poor people.” Jasmine appreciates that TransFair Canada is “helping [her] as a retailer to do something . . . on a scale that [she] couldn’t possibly achieve.” She commented further that she is “glad somebody actually organized it [FT] all and found a way to make it easy for us and make it easy for our customers.” She “always look[s] for marketing initiatives and Fair Trade’s been *terrific*.”

Pointing out that “there aren’t that many people in [location in city] selling Fair Trade coffee”, Jasmine suggests that FT is a “huge marketing ally for people like us. They [FT organization] do all the marketing and we just carry the product.”

Jake notes the importance of people contributing to social justice and why it’s worthwhile. He explains that many people “have a nine-to-five job doing this or doing that” and he states:

people are feeling (short pause) *I would hope a little bit lost . . .* what’s the meaning of life for them, how are they contributing, how are they making society a better place? . . . what point is there to do anything unless you know that it’s progressive, it’s part of an evolutionary process, that ultimately what you’re working on and everything that all of us together on this planet are living for is to embetter each other’s lives, embetter our standard of living and you can’t do that in isolation of putting humans on one side and everything else the plants and the animals and the water on the other, it’s all gotta be an integrated effort. So, what point is there just to continue to keep things rolling in the direction that they’re rolling in my opinion out of control and at some point it’s gonna be so far out of control and we’re gonna have done so much damage it will be irreversible and humanity as we know it will cease to exist and hopefully life on Earth in some other form will continue to exist it doesn’t really paint a very happy picture of the future so why do anything unless you’re contributing to the betterment of society. (Jake)

Ricki believes that FT is a “brick of hope on the road to a better life” and explains that it is worthwhile for the world to be involved in FT because the present world system is not “the ultimate model where you have such a . . . differentiation between First and Third World.” He explains that “the world evolves and develops on trade . . . our lifestyles are substantially better off than they were 50 years ago and that doesn’t mean we have to exclude the Third World countries.” One of the main benefits of FT from Ricki’s perspective is its possible “spillover effect” in terms of other farmers seeing that there is always “opportunity”: “Fair Trade *might* not be the answer but there’s an opportunity for you to venture out and do things and when people take hold of their destiny and they’ve seen some examples then it’s great.” When I asked Ricki why it’s worthwhile for North America to be involved with FT, one of his comments was: “who

doesn't feel good about helping other people improve their life?" For Ricki, one of the main benefits of being involved in FT, besides the benefits for Southern farmers, is his role as facilitator in terms of providing an outlet for farmers to sell their product as well as enabling people in the North to take part in FT (also a benefit for Jasmine).

### **Helping Farmers and Facilitating the Ability of Individuals to Participate**

FT provides interviewees with the ability to help farmers in the South as well as act as facilitators of social justice by providing the opportunity for Northern individuals to purchase FT products. Without companies to sell FT coffee, the movement would not be successful. Grimes (2005:244) notes the limited number of places for producers to sell their product to and "the need to increase fair trade outlets and sales so that many producer groups who currently want to join the movement can have direct access." Ricki notes the importance of his role as a seller of FT coffee because he provides coffee producers with a place to distribute their end-product which allows him to "facilitate and perpetuate this whole cycle of the organization. . . . that's how I'm helping on that end, 'cause the more I use the product the more the product is needed, the more the product is needed the more guarantee the farmers will have somebody to sell it to." He noted: "companies like mine multiplied by a thousand, you get a substantial amount. . . . I mean there's not a million roasters or a million small companies but you've got a substantial number now."

Initially, Jasmine was reluctant to begin to sell FT coffee because she had a "really . . . hard time understanding why you have to pay more and it's just *so much more effort* and the coffee just didn't taste as good." Customer demand is the main reason Jasmine brought FT into her shop because if she was unable to sell it there would be no point in carrying it.

Ricki and Jasmine both refer to the benefit that their role as a seller of FT coffee allows people easy access to the product. "I make it easy for the person who wants to support Fair Trade to . . . buy their coffee here from me and it's win-win" (Jasmine). She believes that "everybody buys something for a reason" and in line with that felt that if a customer is in a shop and "they sell Fair Trade and you feel that in your heart that really could help some family out, you'll choose Fair Trade and *that's why* I think it's important." Ricki compares the fact that as a seller he "make[s] it easy" for people to take part in FT, and his perspective that the reason so many people took part in assisting victims of the tsunami was because it was "*made easy for them* to participate."

Ricki believes that FT is a beneficial organization because: "I *know* that farmers *directly are benefiting from it*. Period. It's not something that an organization is enforcing on somebody else which essentially . . . never works." Ricki maintains that unless there is a retail outlet for farmers to sell FT products to, becoming a member of the FT organization is useless, which is why he feels that his role as a seller is key to the continued success and expansion of FT. Certainly the continued success of FT relies heavily on sellers providing FT coffee for consumers, sellers providing an outlet at which producers can put their end product, and, consumers demanding and buying it.

While Jasmine succumbed to consumer demand, Jim and Donna are innovators in the sense that they are offering FT and related products in a location where it is not easily available. While some interviewees suggest that their consumers are knowledgeable about FT, others suggest that it is their role that brings the awareness of FT to the public. For instance, Jim and Donna say that while "they have a good relationship with the local community" and "some" are interested in their approach, "most" of the people in the local community "don't care" about "the



values” of their business approach. Jim suggests that if not for the wholesale portion of their business in addition to retail sales they would not be able to survive as “there’s not enough business at this point to support a place like this. But it’s here because we wanna be here and we’re gonna make it happen.”

### **Agency, Consumerism & “Voting with Your Dollar”**

FT is one of the “most recent” initiatives “in a long history of using consumer purchasing power to change business practices” (Levi and Linton 2003:407). TransFair Canada (2004i) maintains that “Fair Trade empowers consumers by giving them the option of purchasing according to their principles and values, and assuring them of the ethical source of their purchases.” Refraining from the purchase and consumption of products is arguably impossible. The opportunity to choose to purchase FT products is an important benefit for those who feel a sense of frustration about the unethical production standards of many industries/firms/corporations. Many consumers are unable to find accurate information about production standards and exchange practices of businesses due to the fact that many businesses utilize marketing schemes which make false claims that they are engaging in ethical trade and production. As Nicholls and Opal (2005:201) point out, “[c]onsumers buy Fair Trade products because they believe that their purchase means an improvement in the lives of Third World producers. Without a demonstrable impact on poor producers, consumer brand loyalty in the Fair Trade model would disappear and the entire system would fall apart.” Many consumers and business owners feel empowered and agential by taking part in this movement through the purchase and/or sale of FT products.

Johnston’s (2002) discourse analysis of FT reveals a persistent focus on encouraging consumers to understand the positive role they can play in creating social change through the

selective purchase of FT products. As Johnston explains, “[t]he idea of ‘voting with your dollar’ is heavily emphasised in the fair trade discourse” (44). Many interviewees referred to the act of “voting” for a FT product by purchasing it. Highlighting sweatshops globally and the importance of improving conditions for workers, Appelbaum (2005:378) notes the important role that consumers can play in creating positive social change:

Consumers must be made to realize that they have a strong influence over even the most powerful retailers. The link between workers and consumers lies in promoting policies calling for labor standards and corporate codes of conduct that limit corporate abuse, provide freedom to organize and collectively bargain, and ensure that the public will uphold human rights.

Many consumers and business owners feel empowered and agential by taking part in this movement through the purchase and/or sale of FT products. However, while purchases are *always* political and impactful in the sense that people’s lives are affected by every purchase; such “decisions” and “choices” by the consumer are not always *consciously* “political.” Yet, a common theme of many interviewees is the importance of conscious decision-making when consuming. The idea of “voting with your dollar” implies that consumer demand will encourage companies to begin to offer FT products, or increase their current offering, if they recognize that they are able to make additional profit and/or satisfy their customer base by doing so. Many interviewees argue that consumers hold a great deal of power in terms of whether FT is successful because they decide where and how to spend their money. Simon notes the power of consumer agency: “I hold up a twonie in front of my students and I say, ‘Vote with your dollar. It’s far more powerful than the [electoral] vote that you exercise every five years.’” He maintains that things can change for the better through purchase of FT products or the boycott of Wal-Mart: “Poverty doesn’t just *happen* on this planet. It’s *created* with . . . our bucks. What

we do, what we don't understand, what we don't do creates these conditions [of poverty].”

Simon comments further on the “power” of his money:

Coffee beans have been bought and sold until 2008 through futures contracts. When I realized that, I understood the *power* of that twonie that it takes me to buy this coffee everyday. . . . purchasing fairly traded coffee I believe that we can *shift* the profits from these companies back into the pockets and the families of the workers in a way that creates dignity and an ability to have health care and education.

As many interviewees argue, consumer choices are influential and, indeed, they are. However, such choices are not sufficient to create a dramatic shift in the capitalist marketplace. If the goal is to move toward a society in which ethics in production, consumption, and exchange is the *standard*, consumer “choice” is not sufficient for this to occur. The FT movement appears to place too much emphasis on the consumer as an agent of change. It is unrealistic to expect that FT will be fully, extensively, or even modestly, incorporated into the practices of large corporations and many other businesses within a capitalist system. All businesses will not simply decide to switch to FT. There are not enough benefits for them to do so. Capitalism is about profit and economic inequality. Therefore, I am very skeptical of the notion that corporations/business/the market will decide to simply switch to all FT.

My skepticism about the idea of a simple shift to FT in the market does not mean, however, that I believe that FT cannot have a meaningful impact. Simon discusses the positive impact of specific social justice activism throughout history, and notes his role as an academic researcher and a customer of FT products. One component of Simon's activism involved engaging with people in his new workplace about FT coffee. Simon was in search of a cup of FT coffee and when he was unable to find any his actions initiated the sale of FT coffee at a specific outlet within the workplace. In the process of additional activism, Simon discovered that others within the institution were working on and interested in ethical purchasing. He suggested that

since his initiative to encourage a specific outlet to provide FT coffee was successful that perhaps this was a good impetus for expanding such actions on “an institutional basis.” Simon explained that through additional research it became clear that many other academic institutions in Canada had developed ethical purchasing policies and these documents provided useful background information. Simon is involved in the process of developing an ethical purchasing policy at the institution at which he is employed. He refers to the importance of expanding the opportunity for others to have access to FT coffee. Simon states that “to go about asking for my own cup of fairly traded coffee without trying to contribute to having that available for everyone in the building” would be “incongruent”, due to his interest in social justice as it relates to his role as a “critical social pedagogue.”

Actions on the part of individuals and groups committed to the cause of social justice can create positive change. Simon maintains the importance of recognizing the power of *individuals* in creating social change:

it comes down to *one or two individuals every time*. *Amazing* results have happened with one or two individuals going to the right influential players and saying, “Hey, this is not a bad idea. Here’s who else is doin’ it.” You’re givin’ them some good stories, anecdotes, data, but inviting them to become part of the collective movement towards justice rather than ignorantly wandering along and being unjust or contributing to injustice.

However, many interviewees, including Simon, are interested in encouraging additional people to become involved with FT. For Martyn, the strategy for expansion of FT involves actions such as organizing FT events, being involved in a group that educates students in schools about FT, and doing demos of FT products in stores to introduce people to the product. Jeremy speaks to various groups about FT, produces videos about FT, and does FT product demos among a variety of other actions to promote FT. Haley actively promotes FT through newspaper articles, her business, and radio interviews and plans to get a spokesperson

from TransFair Canada to go with her to various locations to give out free samples of FT coffee and brochures. Martyn believes that many people are unaware of the poor monetary returns received by coffee producers who are not involved in FT and that when people learn about FT and are encouraged to vote with their dollar, this will greatly benefit producers. Donna discusses the importance of voting with one's dollar as a conscious consumer and taking responsibility for one's actions when shopping:

we have lost *so much* by just allowing ourselves to be driven by the bottom line and people tend to blame corporations for this but you *can't* – *you have to blame consumers, right? Because we're the ones who incent the companies to do the things they do* by buying what we buy. I think we as citizens of the world have to start seeing every dollar we spend as a vote and understand what it is we're buying when we're buying it. [Donna]

Donna and Jim suggest that “if people went out there and voted with their dollar then Starbucks *would* change because they want the dollars.” However, they claim that unfortunately, “most people don't care.”

Consumer power is limited in the sense that not everybody is in an economic position to participate in FT or has the time to learn about it. Jim believes that while voting with one's dollar is an important act, it is not always easy to do because it is often difficult to know the conditions of production behind every product. He and Donna explain that while labeling helps consumers to be more informed, labels are not available on every product. Jim points out that if consumers were educated and knowledgeable about the conditions of production they would likely make the ethical choice. They find comfort in having personal relationships based on trust and the sharing of information with the people they deal with in their business and, also, when possible in their personal consumption habits, because in so doing they know about the origins of the product and the conditions of production, whether or not a particular label indicates that a product has been produced in an ethical manner.

Waridel (2002:113) notes that labeling allows consumers to have detailed access to information about the “environmental and social impacts” of products. However, she (113) also points out that labeling of all products is “unlikely to happen in the near future” due to governmental and WTO restrictions on a variety of labeling initiatives. Donna believes that consumers must not blame government for problems in regards to standards if they take contradictory actions in their daily consumption patterns. She points out that while it is important to participate in democracy by voting in elections, it is also important for consumers to think about where they spend their money as well as to contact elected governmental representatives and encourage them to label products with information about where products come from and how they are produced. Donna states:

if we wanna see something different, we can't be going out and spending our money to support all of the system, the institutions, the dynamic, the value chain, right, of the whole thing that's doing the opposite, right? . . . if we want to make change we need to use the fact that we can vote to say things to the government like could you please insist that my label tells me something about where this came from and then I can make a choice and I can put pressure on the manufacturer to give me what I want. *And in the end, if what we all want is Nestlé in a can we're gonna get it. And we're gonna get the world that we have voted for – cause that's what we've got now, right?*

Consumers can create important and powerful change through their choices/purchases/agency, yet, again, there seems to be too much reliance and emphasis on such actions. The availability of ethically produced products is a way to indicate and promote the reality that perhaps (most likely) products *without* such ethical labels are produced in an unethical manner. For this reason, ethical ‘stamps of approval’, such as the FT logo, are most definitely a positive step. However, it is important to expand the idea and act of ‘letting the consumer decide’ to an organization of society in which labels are no longer needed to signify ‘alternative’ products that are produced in an ethical manner, but to work toward *requiring* an *ethical standard* by which *all* products are produced and exchanged. Jake also suggests the importance of labeling “to help people

understand exactly what's going into a product and lots of organizations fight . . . labeling. Why not force a company who's . . . operating sweatshops in Indonesia somewhere to make sneakers, why not force them to put that on their label? Put it in the customer's face and let them decide." Pressuring businesses that operate with unethical standards to label their products as such, and providing consumers with the ability to choose between a product produced in a sweatshop versus one produced with ethical standards appears to be less worthy of focusing energy than does working towards general *regulations and standards* for all products. Very likely, no consumer is interested in purchasing products in which people suffered in the act of production. While a label can signify an ethical product, this is not particularly effective to the overall betterment of society if a low-income Northern consumer feels guilty, but cannot afford the higher priced product. Labeling is a consciousness-raising and beneficial act, but it is not enough.

Also, the idea that the world we have now is the world that we "voted for" (Donna), is not entirely accurate from a sociological point of view. While humans have indeed, 'created' institutions (i.e. capitalism, the marketplace, etc.) many people are antagonistically against such forms of societal organization which have been designed and perpetuated by those in power. Humans can indeed exercise agency to create change, but the world in which we presently exist is not necessarily the world that we imagine or desire. This is, of course, exemplified by Marx's insistence that "we make our own history, but not in circumstances of our own choosing" (Hale 1995:14). As stated above, referring to Abrams and Giddens, Hale (14) points to their insistence of thinking about human action in the context of "historical time." Giddens and Abrams strive to bridge the gap between structure and agency through recognizing that "human actions are shaped by prior human actions. Structures comprise actions taken collectively in the past. Actions

produce structures for the future” (Hale 14). I insist that positive action, even a small act (the purchase of FT coffee), should not be discredited, as such actions provide important benefits for Southern producers while, simultaneously providing the building blocks to a progressive and ethical organization of society.

Discussing how consumers make purchasing decisions, Ricki believes that a variety of ethical purchasing options would enable consumers to choose more easily based on *quality* as opposed to feeling the “social pressure” to purchase the only available ethical product “and then the consumer votes with their dollars.” However, Ricki’s perception is that most consumers are not necessarily focused on making ethical purchasing decisions for personal reasons but rather do so when they succumb to public pressure.

Many interviewees think and act beyond their individual purchasing decisions to issues such as “sustainability” and social justice. Johnston (2002:56) suggests that:

Building alternative identities derived from conscientious consumption may be a more realistic strategy than expecting collective identities of citizenship to spontaneously emerge from thin air. Although there is no inevitable transition, conscientious consumption could serve as a conduit to a broader notion of citizenship, where an obsessive focus on individual ‘choice’ is replaced by, or at least supplemented with, a broader notion of community, sustainability, justice and democracy.

Simon states that presently, “similar to what [Henry] Giroux’s critiquing . . . citizenship is equated with consumerism. . . . and materialism alone until at such point . . . young people particularly become awakened to a kind of radicalized democracy which means that we participate in this in an active way.” Simon maintains that “*until then* our buck is just as powerful.” Yet, he is also an adamant proponent of people writing letters to the newspaper and governmental representatives in order to exercise their political democratic agency as he believes in the importance of participating in democracy by accessing governmental representatives and sharing his interest in FT with them. He participates in such activities which “lin[k] the academy



and critical thinking with active participatory democracy which *I maintain and argue hasn't even happened yet.*"

Interviewees vary in terms of the importance they place on the role of the government and the importance of accessing politicians to voice one's interest in FT (although not all discuss the issue). Martyn maintains that if people just simply buy FT products by voting with their dollar, this will produce a change in the structure of international trade. He notes the simplicity of purchasing a FT product and that people "don't have to do much" as opposed to more time-consuming actions such as "knock[ing] on your MP's door" or "enact[ing] laws or policies at the government level." While Martyn suggests that regulation of trade "will *help* reduce some of the unfairness in trading practices" he believes that if people just "start buying this product [FT] business will take care of things." However, consumer agency, on its own, will not force businesses to "take care of things" and create an expansion of FT.

Jeremy believes that the benefits of FT lie in its separateness from the state as it relates to the running of FT organizations. While he is supportive of the financial contribution of various governmental groups, such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), to the maintenance of the FT program, he is adamant that if the state was in charge of running TransFair Canada it would not be a success. He argues that "[national] governments are very inefficient" at running programs such as FT because "they're sluggish and they're rife with all sorts of influences from business, from individuals." Jeremy is thrilled that TransFair Canada and FLO are "governed democratically" by "a voluntary board" of a "group of people who are citizens." Emphasizing that the FT industry "was worth a billion bucks last year", which he notes as "*huge*", Jeremy states: "the other phenomenal thing for me is that it shows that we can actually run things -- sophisticated things -- this [FT] is a complicated thing -- we can run 'em.

We don't *need* the state to run them. We can have these relationships around the world that . . . don't exist in the world of the state so that to me is very liberating." This appears to be one of the most beneficial aspects of FT from my perspective, as well.

Simon highlights the importance of including city councils and government representatives in the push for more FT products. Simon writes letters to newspapers in association with his NGO involvement and he states: "depending on what the issue is of the day I keep tying global poverty and children's rights, Fair Trade, whatever it is I can work in to Letters to the Editor." In terms of activism related to FT, Simon was also involved in initiating some questions about FT on a survey conducted at his workplace. Simon is involved with an NGO which "influenced the [Calgary] city council . . . to only offer Fair Trade coffee." As Simon pointed out, "the first two weeks of May which are *globally* Fair Trade Weeks all around the globe . . . Calgary has proclaimed Fair Trade Weeks in the city, so all the employees and all of the events that go on in Calgary are using FT products." Simon also pointed to the expansion of FT at other universities, Canadian city councils, and G8 meetings. With the support of faculty and students at the campus where he teaches, Simon's aim is to invite the city council in his area to do as other councils have done.

### **Room for Growth and Expansion of Fair Trade**

The opportunity to expand FT certification, in terms of including more commodities, and also of expanding the growth of already certified FT products, such as coffee, is of interest to many interviewees. Availability of FT products elsewhere suggests that there is room for the Canadian market to possibly expand. Jeremy points out that the Canadian market for FT coffee may only expand to be 5% of the coffee market, yet, that there is "*a lot*" of room to expand it

because it is “nowhere near 5%. I don’t even know if we’re a percent yet.” In Jeremy’s experience:

the way Fair Trade is growing is very organic . . . where you tell somebody and then they tell somebody . . . the sales reflect that too, that it is almost a word of mouth kind of thing and so that’s good because . . . Those are quality consumers. If they come to it not because of the flashy packaging and because they saw a commercial on TV about it . . . but rather that they heard about it and it’s a quality product and it has this ethical framework.

Some interviewees point out that size of the market for FT products varies between locations in places throughout Canada and Europe (and the fact that FT began in Europe). Some note that there is a great deal of opportunity for the market for FT products to expand and include more products. FT is currently “a very small market, it’s one percent so there’s *lots* of room for growth. In places like Europe I think twenty-five percent of bananas are Fair Trade” (Martyn). In Europe, notes Marytyn, “there’s big penetration for coffee and tea and they’ve got *many more* products” such as juices, fruits (pineapples, oranges) rice, chocolate, and other products (some of these are also available in Canada but not in all provinces). Some interviewees noted their interest in other FT products. Jeremy and Simon refer to their interest in FT wine and Simon noted his experience with easier access to FT products when in Europe where FT is more “mainstream.” Jeremy refers to the fact that FT wine is “just starting in Canada” and he is also interested in FT cotton because of its practicality and the fact that “the T-shirt is the coffee of the textile world.” He further notes that “everybody has T-shirts and that might be a place to enter [the FT market].” Martyn was involved in attempting to bring FT bananas to a particular location in Canada. Jake noted the fact that he has seen FT bananas, albeit “*rarely*.”

The availability or non-availability of FT products in particular locales provides consumers with the option of asking sellers to make such products available. Jasmine decided to offer FT products due to a desire on the part of her consumers to have access to FT coffee. As a

consumer of FT coffee, Simon was “*shocked*” when he discovered that FT coffee was not available at his new workplace. He began to investigate and was effectively the initiator of FT coffee in a particular shop at the university. He spoke with the owner and asked whether she knew about FT coffee and she replied: ‘Oh, yeah Free Trade, we know about that.’ Simon says that Free Trade and FT are “two separate and distinct issues that you have to immediately get into a little bit of social justice and research and education as soon as you engage somebody.” Some people confuse FT and Free Trade. Grimes (2005:245) notes that “[t]he public must be educated to understand what fair trade is exactly and how it differs from free trade. Fair trade standards must be clear to industry and consumers. If not, confusion could cause damaging controversy to the movement.” There is a notable distinction between Free and Fair Trade (see **Ch. Two**). It is important that this difference is promoted more accurately in the FT literature and education, as it appears that some people confuse the two. As Ricki’s point exemplifies: “*then* there’s the whole Free Trade agreement. Free Trade has nothing to do with Fair Trade but you still have a portion of people that come in [to business] and they think they’re buying Free Trade coffee and they think that they’re doing something good and they think that’s the right thing to do--they have *no* clue and they’ll refer to it as Free Trade.”

As a result of Simon’s activism, FT coffee began to be offered at this locale “within two to three weeks” and the owner was “surprised” due to the high level of “*demand*” for the coffee (Simon). Dialoguing with colleagues, Simon discovered that “there were efforts previously” to provide FT coffee on campus but a particular contractor affiliated with the university “was resisting.” In an effort to take action against the contractor, the colleagues changed the location of their meetings which provided the opportunity to be able to have FT coffee served to them by the shop that had agreed to provide the FT coffee option.

Social justice activists and consumers interested in FT often have the capacity to create positive changes when concrete actions are taken in order to expand the FT movement and market. Sellers are often willing to offer FT products if they can ensure a customer base. As well, there is room for expansion of the FT market. Jasmine has had great success as a seller of FT coffee: "I can't see a downside. And I've been doing it for . . . a lot of years and *every year* we sell more. So, there's obviously a growing demand and interest and as people discover us and know that we do it, more people come for it." While Simon refers to non-interest in FT on the part of another business, his actions *did* lead to the availability of FT coffee in a place where there was none prior.

### **Organic Certification as "Mainstream" & Fair Trade as Friendly Partner**

Organic certification has had much success (Raynolds 2000). In order to continue the success of FT, it must be "a sustainable trend" as opposed to a short-lived "faddishness", (Nicholls and Opal 2005:232). Customers and activists noted their interest in organic products and all interviewees involved in the sale of FT coffee combine it with organic.<sup>17</sup> Simon and Martyn are interested in organic/FT products as consumers. Sellers offer different reasons for having the combination of FT and organic. Haley likes the combination because FT benefits people and organic benefits the environment. (It has been her experience that consumers are more aware of FT than organic). Ricki thinks consumers are more aware of organic and he brought in FT because of his interest in FT and he believes that consumer awareness of FT is relatively low; Jasmine says she carried organic before FT and has combined the two because of

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<sup>17</sup> However, while for Jake the combination of FT and organic is *essential* (but not sufficient) to a sustainable approach to business and while organic is extremely important to him because of his deep interest in environmental protection, certification it is not always possible in the context of a few countries or if producers cannot afford certification. Still, these coffees, certified organic or not, meet the "base line philosophy in terms of organic" and are "[g]rown without pesticides any type of chemical fertilizer, any type of chemical input." (Jake also explains that the FT organization is "*only* accepting . . . new cooperatives on the [FT] Register that *have* organic certification.")

space limitations; Jim & Donna are interested in organic products first and environmental issues and FT certification is in the secondary; all of their coffee is organic. All of Jeremy's coffee is organic.

In Ricki's experience, consumer-awareness of organics is high but, not yet so for FT: "I think in [city] we reached the tipping point with . . . organics. It's mainstream now." He states that some of his consumers buy his FT/organic coffee because it is organic: "I still have a . . . portion of my customer base that will come in buy the coffee and have no clue about Fair Trade." He states that FT is still an "alternative thing, . . . an unknown thing, people aren't aware of the dynamics of it and also the association with high quality . . . bit by bit we're getting there." He states that he will know that people have become more aware of FT "as soon as . . . the ones that have been buying a particular coffee for the last ten years all of a sudden look over going, 'Oh, you've got this, oh, o.k., you know what, this time I'm gonna try the Fair Trade.'" He explains that if consumers purchase his coffee because it is organic, they will learn about FT because of the FT/organic combination. He believes that organic appears to be better for the "sustainability" of the environment and the workers but that he could possibly be shown otherwise and is not personally interested in organic. All of his FT coffee is certified organic and he suggests that he is raising awareness of FT. Also, he is "not yet that blown away by the Fair Trade concept with respect to the awareness of the consumer. I still find that a solid proportion of people that are buying the coffee are buying it 'cause it's organic. They have not the greatest knowledge or awareness of Fair Trade." However, the following in some ways contradicts his belief about people being more aware of organic than FT because he says he sells FT/organic coffee because of his belief that "somebody who is aware of Fair Trade would be also aware of organic." However, he is likely referring to the small amounts of people who he perceives are

aware of FT and, assumes they would also be interested in organic (likely this is true for consumers; I am personally interested in both FT and organic, as are some interviewees).

Jeremy suggests that “it does provide a market advantage just to be organic” and refers to the fact that organic is “pretty mainstream.” As it relates to FT, the decision is altruistic: “it’s a way for us to get people who look for organic products to think about Fair Trade, to understand what it is and that really the best way to ensure the quality of your product is to ensure that the people making it have a good life.” While selling organic products appears to be in some ways a self-interested move for business because consumers are more aware of it than FT, some sellers are clearly personally interested in organics as well, some more than others. The sale of FT is more of an altruistic move on the part of most sellers.

Martyn believes that “[o]rganic products are where you can really expand Fair Trade.” He bases this on the fact that the price difference between the two is not very substantial and also suggests:

my ideal dream . . . is for people to be able to recognize that [FT] . . . just as much as they recognize organics now. . . . they buy it [organic] as opposed to something that’s not organic if they’re health conscious. I’d like people to do the same thing with Fair Trade. This is Fair Trade. This is good for the people who are producing the main ingredients in this product. So, I’ll buy that.

Also, as Martyn notes, because there are many organic products available in large supermarkets, the combination of FT and organic would provide an opportunity for FT products to be sold because the two certifications are easily combined in a product. Haley points out, “organic has started to grow now and . . . there’s certainly a little more of that in the supermarket because it just started to grow so I’m hoping that we can do the same thing with Fair Trade.”

Jeremy raises a crucial point in highlighting the distinction between personal preference for organic in terms of health concerns as opposed to a desire to protect the Earth. He notes the importance of people who are interested in organics to move to thinking “about people” and FT products:

organics are really changing the retail landscape but . . . it's just a different way of selling a product. . . . They don't define themselves in terms of a relationship, except to the Earth but most people buy organics because of the relationship the product has with their body they don't wanna get cancer so they buy organic products as opposed to they don't want the Earth poisoned and bird habitat destroyed or whatever. That's another level. So, to get them to think about people next would be good. Get them thinking about oh, I don't wanna buy a product that enslaves people, which 80% of the products we buy do. (Jeremy)

Martyn (refer to his above quote) argues the same point as Jeremy.

Ricki's approach appears to suggest a similar stance (i.e. self-interested consumers purchase organic and in the end the farmers benefit when the consumer buys his FT/organic coffee). Ricki states: “I don't feel like, oh, o.k., I'm tricking them into buying Fair Trade coffee. It's like the awareness is there, . . . – generally consumers are quite selfish and they will follow trends and organic is a huge trend now and Fair Trade for *my* end is benefiting because the awareness is *much* greater for that . . . – in the secondary” (Ricki).

Haley maintains that “the main reason” people buy coffee from her is because it is FT. While her customers “like the combination” of FT and organic she has the perception that “the organic market in this area is smaller than the Fair Trade.”

Interviewees' experiences vary in their reasoning for combining FT with organic. While many interviewees believe that consumers are more aware of organic than FT, this is not a consistent belief between all interviewees. Some believe that the mainstream status of organic certification provides an opportunity to expand the FT market. Some argue that consumers



affiliate organics with personal health and that FT is a 'different level' as it expands beyond self-interest to an emphasis on solidarity with people involved in production.

### **Trust in Fair Trade Certification (TransFair Canada & FLO) and its Auditing Process**

The FT certification process provides consumers and sellers with a sense of "trust" and appreciation of the "checks and balances" of the FT process so that they have "assurance" that ethical standards are followed (e.g. farmers are getting paid, social premiums are used for community development, child labour is absent).

A common theme throughout all of the interviews was the issue of trust related to the FT certification process. Giddens (1990:34) defines trust as "confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events." According to O'Hara and Stagl (2001:544) "social theory suggests that in situations of increasing distrust, alternative movements will emerge as consumers get organized to overcome their sense of unreliability and insecurity." FT and its affiliated certification process can be understood as an alternative movement that attempts to create a sense of trust in the social relations of production, consumption, and exchange. The FT certification process provides trust and accountability through "transparent" details and on-going "dialogue" about production and trade (TransFair Canada 2004j).

Most interviewees refer specifically to the benefits of the FT certification process having "checks and balances" in place such as audits, submitting reports, keeping track of how much is sold, and the process of authorization. Jasmine is very comfortable being a member of the FT certification body as a licensee because she "believes" that they are a "bona fide" organization that has lots of "checks and balances" in place. It has been Jasmine's experience that one must be skeptical of who you "believe" but she does not feel skeptical of the claims made by TransFair because the certification process is third-party regulated and she thinks that "there's

enough in place that the money is getting back to the people [families and farmers] that need it most.” Jasmine explains her trust in the FT certification process: “Fair Trade has been very widely marketed and appears to be from all sides heavily audited. . . . you want . . . a body that is going to have an independent certification so that you know that if you’re gonna spend your money someplace that it’s not just lip service that the money’s actually getting through and helping somebody at the other end.” Jasmine also points out that as a seller she pays a premium “*all the time* on everything that you sell with Fair Trade coffee.” Haley also is very interested in having the “assurance” through TransFair Canada’s certification standards that the coffee that she sells has proceeded through a system of checks and balances with third party certification. Haley explains: “I want to have that assurance that what I’m telling my customers is what is really happening. I cannot verify it myself, right?”

Martyn notes his trust in the TransFair logo and the certification process that is behind it: “a key element of my campaign is to promote the TransFair logo.” If the product does not have the TransFair Canada logo he does not “consider it Fair Trade.” This point of Martyn’s highlights the debate within the movement of distinguishing between FT certified products and products that claim to be traded fairly but do not carry the FT logo. He further explains that the “logo is a guarantee that . . . it is being audited by a third party.” Martyn also suggests that there is “a lot of opportunity for dishonesty and . . . there’ve been cases where organizations have put the Fair Trade label on a bag of coffee just to get a better price for it and it’s not even Fair Trade.”

Jake notes his trust in the FT organization and how he appreciates their role as “audit police” in “ensuring that the farmer’s being paid a fair price and the money’s getting into their hands and ensuring that the roasters and importers are legitimately licensed and paying the

Fairtrade Labeling Organization to essentially act like parents.” He talks further about why he considers FLO to be the only legitimate FT certifier:

They’re the first, they’re the biggest, they’re the best, they really are focused on doing good. There’s no other organization that I know of that even comes close to being as effective as this organization is . . . they’re really *police* monitoring the buying and selling of coffee and to a lesser extent a developer helping farmers organize into cooperatives really a benevolent organization . . . they’re not in it for the money, they’re in it for the improvement of the lives of and livelihoods of small farmers. (Jake)

if I wanna certify that my coffee’s Fair Trade I have only one choice and that’s to work with the Fairtrade Labelling Organization. There are no other options. Or I can just go out there and make claims that I pay a fair price for the coffee that I purchase without any certification, help, or support. (Jake)

Jake emphasized that the FT process is set up to help the “segment” of farmers (e.g. coffee or cocoa) “which was being most exploited.” He explained that the FT certification helps him because the process guarantees that the money ends up in the “hands of the farmer.” As well, states Jake, FT “helps me in *making a claim* to the consumer that . . . I’m part of this [FT] organization that the product that I’m selling you *is* Fair Trade.” Jake stated that if consumers want to “learn more” about FT he can explain the details or he can direct them to TransFair Canada. He points out the FT organization is “a mechanism, it’s a label, it’s a service that the Fairtrade Labelling Organization is providing me . . . I get to *make the claim* that it’s Fair Trade and in the background they’re running around auditing everybody which means I don’t have to. *And* I don’t have to say anything else to the consumer. It’s very simple.” The FT logo on the package provides the consumer with legitimacy so that they are assured that the product and the business are complying with certain regulatory standards. Businesses do not have to provide detailed explanations about supply chain operations because the FT logo essentially speaks for itself.

Simon notes his trust in the work done by TransFair Canada: “[w]hat I do know is when I go to the TransFair logo I get what I need in terms of an ethical product”, as well as his belief that FT certified products benefit the producer who “picked the beans” in an “explicit” and direct way. FT serves as a way to connect consumers to producers in a direct way because of their sense of “reliability” and “trust” involved in this process. In terms of his campus activism and consumer support of FT products, Simon explains that the TransFair Canada logo is “enough of an imprimatur for me to start with.” Simon states: “I’m happy to pay 12 to 14 to 15 bucks for a *really* good pound of Fair Trade organic coffee and especially if it’s got a TransFair logo then I’m *convinced* that it’s benefiting an individual farmer and their family.”

Some companies develop policies which are unaffiliated with the FT certification process. While Ricki believes that the “checks and balances” associated with the FT “process” are beneficial and presently relies singularly on FT to certify his FT coffee selection, Ricki is open to the possibility that other forms of “direct” trade “might be better” in which people trade with farmers outside of the purview of a certifier and “theoretically” provide farmers with a “fair wage.” Simon notes that Starbucks engages in such activities and have “their own arrangement to trade fairly traded products with Starbucks.”<sup>18</sup> They don’t need to go to TransFair and they don’t wanna go to TransFair. I didn’t get too deeply into whether Starbucks is or isn’t [trading fairly]. And I didn’t get a plane ticket and go down to talk to the farmers that are selling to Starbucks so I’m not sure how legit that is and I haven’t accessed any documents.” Starbucks (2006a) advertises that all of their coffee is ethically sourced and that it “is committed to

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<sup>18</sup> I am not certain, but I believe Simon is referring to Starbucks’ participation in the following program: “In conjunction with Conservation International, Starbucks developed socially responsible coffee buying guidelines called C.A.F.E. Practices (Coffee and Farmer Equity Practices) in 2001. These guidelines are designed to help us work with coffee farmers to ensure high-quality coffee and promote equitable relationships with farmers, workers and communities, as well as protect the environment” (Starbucks 2006b). Such actions are completely unrelated to FT certification.

purchasing our coffee in an ethical and sustainable manner, regardless of labels and certifications.” While Simon purchased “a couple of pounds of *their* [Starbucks] fair trade for comparative purposes” after receiving a gift certificate, he found that taste-wise, “the coffee *sucks*” as compared to the FT coffee he purchases from Ten Thousand Villages. Yet, he is interested in finding out whether “Starbucks [is] doin’ good business or not” and would “like to talk to the farmers that sell Starbucks their version of fair trade, organic.” Of importance in Simon’s statement is that the key beneficiaries of FT are the farmers. If the farmers are pleased with the process of trading, whether through a certifier or with a business that operates outside of such regulations, then the process is a success. I am unsure as to the impact of such “ethical” trading practices for farmers as my research does not involve speaking with farmers. However, I anticipate that the FT system provides a *much better* deal for farmers than Starbucks’ alternative form of “ethical” trading.

While Jim and Donna explain that FT is a “good program” and they are supportive of what it does for producers which indicates that they trust the FT organization, they are also involved in other “fairly traded” exchanges based on relationships. Jim, Donna, and Jeremy refer to the idea of customers trusting *them* and their relationships with producers. Donna points out that she believes it is important to let consumers decide how they want to spend their money in terms of choosing which coffee they would like to buy from them (i.e. FT certified, RA certified, or trust her personal relationships with producers and importers that exist outside of the purview of any certification bodies). She explains: “I wish that everybody were a little bit more truthful about what is actually certified Fair Trade and what isn’t and we try and be very careful about it” to ensure their consumers “vote with their dollar the way they want to.” In reference to the personal trusting relationship he has with one of the “major suppliers” of he and Donna’s

company, Jim explains: “Whether or not it’s some other Fair Trade body coming and saying, ‘Yeah, it’s good.’ I mean I don’t need that. I can rely on him because . . . I know him personally and I know . . . he goes to these places in the middle of nowhere and helps them improve their quality because, for instance, they can’t . . . ask for higher prices if your product won’t support it.” Donna explained that “the certifications are important only because it keeps charlatans at bay.” She states: “There are people out there who say, ‘*Oh*, don’t worry about the certifications, cause X, Y, and Z, and all my stuff is fair and blah, blah, blah,’ and they’re lying, right?” Haley states: “there’s a lot of people out there that tells you, ‘Oh, we don’t *need* to be Fair Trade certified . . . we’re doing all these things, we’re investing in the community, we have schools, we pay fair prices.’ . . . *but*, there’s no assurance that that’s really happening.” As explained above, Haley refers to both distrust of Southern farmers and Northern businesses who claim to be engaged in FT. Jim and Donna also refer to mistrust of Northern business.

Jeremy firmly believes that it is important to “build the brand recognition of the TransFair trademark” and explains that TransFair Canada is there “to talk about the certification and the label” and “back us up”; yet, he explains that “we really get to people’s hearts . . . by really communicating *well* what it is we’re doing and who the people are that we . . . have a relationship with -- the producers.” While TransFair has a key role in terms of certification, Jeremy states that success of their business does not depend on TransFair “making their label stronger” but rather due to Jeremy’s company’s “high quality product” and their ability to “present a relationship to the consumer” which is based on their worker co-op having a relationships with the coffee producers. He explains that such legitimacy-building and dealing with “the issue of authenticating Fair Trade” involves showing customers photos of coffee

producers that they have “met”, as opposed to “a photograph of somebody that we bought from a catalogue.”

Some interviewees referred to certifications for various handicrafts which fall outside the purview of TransFair Canada. For instance, Martyn explains that while he is supportive of the products sold by Ten Thousand Villages, which is “part of an organization that promotes Fair Trade and . . . *do* a good job of supporting Fair Trade co-operatives, handicraft co-operatives in developing countries” he believes that problems arise when individuals are involved in selling handicrafts that claim to be “fair trade” but they are not affiliated with Ten Thousand Villages or any certifiers. He claims that such handicrafts “may be genuinely fair trade but *you don’t know*.”

While interviewees trust the FT certification process, some are involved in ethical exchanges outside of this system, and some also critique various aspects of FT (see **Ch. Four**).

#### **Fair Trade Targets Poverty & Producers in Need**

As Nicholls and Opal (2005:29) point out, the US\$1.26/pound received by FT coffee producers “will typically be double what they would have received in the market.” All interviewees referred to the increased financial return for producers who are involved in the production and exchange of FT products. Martyn states that “the certified Fair Trade process is guaranteeing a minimum price for the producer. And that’s . . . why I’m involved in Fair Trade.” Jake notes the benefits of FT for small-scale coffee farmers and explains that while FT cannot help every farmer, it does assist a large number because FT “targets” the “millions of farmers” that are “living in poverty.” For Jasmine, FT is beneficial because it provides farmers with a “guaranteed floor price”, “loans”, and “reassurance” that they will have “crops”, “land”, and “money to feed their family.”

Simon found out about FT through his involvement with an NGO, which is involved in various initiatives, such as lobbying efforts, in order to “end global *poverty*.” When I asked him why it’s worthwhile to be involved with FT, as an individual, he referred to issues of poverty and children’s rights:

I found that the largest single sociological factor, societal factor impeding . . . the implementation of children’s rights was poverty. It was poverty in my own community, poverty in my own country and global poverty and as I traveled to the UN and began to do more in-depth research I realized that systemically, politically, and through globalization, absolute poverty was the largest single impediment to implementing the Convention [on the Rights of the Child].

Simon explained that “unfair trade practices is one of the largest impediments to people being able to live a life with dignity and peace.”

Jeremy pointed out the importance of “truly valuing what things are worth” and “economic valuation” which has to do with being aware of the “cost of production so that people get a reasonable return for their work.” He also noted the importance of factoring “working capital” (i.e. profit) into financial exchanges so people will be able to sustain themselves and/or their business.

When I asked Jake if he encountered any challenges in his involvement with FT he explained that it is Southern producers who are faced with challenges, not his business:

In their countries it is not unusual for a co-operative on the Fair Trade register to pack their coffee on their truck . . . [and] the second truck behind [is] packed full of farmers with guns to protect their coffee as they drive it to . . . the port for export. That kind of situation exists in many places . . . they’re fighting for change in their country really and they’ve gotta protect their interests.

Southern coffee producers are in need of the increased financial return provided by FT and, as Jake states, this is not always a simple task. When I asked Jake about social justice issues that he sees as connected to FT he referred to the detrimental impact of “larger companies propping up certain families or certain businesses” which results in “those families and those



businesses using the small farmer just as a source of cheap labour and not wanting . . . the status quo changed.” This highlights FT’s beneficial role in providing a more secure livelihood for farmers as it provides protection from powerful corporate interests.

Ricki emphasizes that a gap between “wealth and non-wealth” is inevitable, yet “wealth and starvation” is problematic. Ricki maintains that FT contributes to lessening this gap. In terms of social justice issues connected to FT, Ricki states: “human rights – you can subcategorize it into labour, and women, and religion, and, whatever it is. And standard of living you can subcategorize it into personal living, or educational system, or health care.” In terms of standard of living, Ricki emphasized that people in the “Third World” are desirous of basic needs such as education for their children, “clean water and substantial amount of food” as opposed to the “view that we need to provide them with the three car garage.”

Ricki’s social construction of the “Third World” is as “isolated” countries that need to “look for opportunities” to make their lives better. This view is problematic in its assumption that particular countries and people live in poverty as a result of their own faults. Also, it does not highlight the fact that wealthy countries become wealthy through exploitation and colonialism (Sorenson 2003b:79). There are many factors that affect one’s ability to thrive and, all too often, merely survive. Ricki’s general perception is that the FT organization has to “sell their mission to illiterate, uneducated farmers.” This view misses the fact that coffee producers living in poverty likely do not have to be “convinced” to be offered more money for their product and become involved in FT.

The next section expands on the issue of increased financial gain and discusses the democratic organizational structure of FT producer groups.

## Fair Trade & Co-ops

With FT, there is a focus on democracy, in terms of the way that Southern farmers organize: “producers exercise control by owning the land that they work on and by organizing into co-operatives or another type of democratic association that is appropriate to the particular settings” (CFTN N.d.). Martyn states: “to be certified Fair Trade . . . you have to adhere to a democratically run organization.”<sup>19</sup> Jake, Martyn, and Jeremy maintain that the co-operative structure of FT is beneficial as it allows small farmers, who are otherwise forced to sell to “middlemen,” access to the market. Small individual family farmers do not produce enough coffee to be able to garner a high price from “coyotes” (i.e. middlemen) but within the FT co-op structure they can access a fair price for their coffee. FT networks provide the benefit of eliminating the role of “coyotes” and co-operatives allow farmers to collectively make decisions. According to Haley, FT co-ops provide farmers with the ability to purchase and share various technologies:

what fair trade does is like they take all these little farmers and they put them together . . . they all belong to these co-operatives. And they assign like one place that’s kind of like the centre where they all meet or . . . What Fair Trade does is like they provide financing for them to invest in the quality of the coffee. They teach them how to produce a high quality coffee and then they provide all the technology, like the phone, the computers, all these things so they can have access to international markets.

Raynolds (2002a:22) notes that FT coffee producers benefit from the transparent communication process facilitated by FT. Northern importers provide producers with information about “market trends, quality specifications, and international prices.” This is largely beneficial to producers because “access to market information can be very important in negotiating better prices from coffee brokers” (22). According to Raynolds (22) many studies

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<sup>19</sup> In cases when workers are hired by an owner, “the workers have the right to organize and negotiate through free trade unions” (CFTN N.d.).

indicate “that the technical expertise and market information provided by FT networks is actually more important than the price premiums.” Martyn highlights what he believes to be one of the main benefits of FT and explains that many people are unaware of the benefits that farmers gain by belonging to a FT co-operative in terms of their ability to access coffee price information. He explains that while farmers involved in FT may not be able to sell all of their coffee through FT networks and must resort to the conventional market for a portion of their sales, their access to market information will allow them to access better prices and not have to resort to selling to middlemen:

being a part of the co-operative you’re still benefiting . . . even if you are not selling it to the Fair Trade market because people in the co-operative know what the world market price is, they are well aware of the world situation whereas the poor farmer in the middle of nowhere . . . has no idea what the world market price is, he’s just being exploited. So, the Fair Trade market, just even co-operatives help . . . these farmers get . . . a fair world market price as well. So, it’s good to be part of the Fair Trade movement there because they are well connected to the world. (Martyn)

people don’t realize this . . . the argument is, “Oh, there’s no market for the Fair Trade price,” but even if they sell five percent of their coffee Fair Trade the other ninety-five percent will be sold at a decent price. If these farmers were all by themselves they would be much poorer. So, that’s a big benefit that I don’t think people see. And it’s not really explained. I think TransFair should do a better job of talking about the mechanics, the detailed breakdown of all this. A lot of people don’t know. A lot of people in the [FT volunteer group] don’t know this. (Martyn).

Jeremy belongs to a worker co-op and one of the main reasons is because he believes that if producers involved in FT in the South are organized into co-ops then people in the North who are selling FT products should also change their business structure to be more in line with a co-operative approach. He states that Northern co-operatives are the “righteous element of the Fair Trade movement” and that it makes FT more of a “partnership” between producers and sellers, as opposed to just simply providing a distinct “market image” for Northern businesses. Jeremy states: “Fair Trade as a movement is based on economic

democracy, right as much as it is on paying people a fair wage, it's also democratizing that wage. So, the people who participate in the production have some control over their lives economically." He explains:

that's an imposition that is made by the First World. . . . those are rules that were – are designed by FLO [Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International]. I mean they're based on the history of Fair Trade – of formal Fair Trade, but at the same time, they're formalized and written up in a contract form by FLO and they're enforced so if you're not a co-op or a democratic organization then you can't participate in Fair Trade in the South. But those rules don't apply to us in the North and I think that's a contradiction. It's almost a neo-colonial or a paternalistic relationship. That we expect *them* to look after their communities, we expect *them* to promote women and involve people in health care and education and also be good to the earth and all that stuff, but, anybody in the North can open up a Fair Trade coffee shop and they can be the biggest pricks in the world and be greedy and everything but there are no rules that apply to them. (Jeremy)

For Jeremy, an extremely important aspect of FT is "attempt[ing] to make transformations in our economy here in the same way that they *are* transforming their economies in the South with Fair Trade." Jeremy explains that the "contracts" developed by FLO are "a good thing" if all of the people affected by them are "comfortable with them." But, he points out that these contracts developed as a result of the fact that "people in the North tend to be cynical to a certain extent about projects in the Third World that are controlled by people in the Third World because they have these racist notions around people ripping them off and corruption" He continues:

I think that the contract's helped the folks in the North be comfortable that they're actually making a change and it also provided concrete guidelines for people in the South and for organizers even to use to keep their projects on track, but I mean, the same kind of corruption and sort of misleading notions exist in the North and motivations as well in terms of greed and making money and all that sort of stuff so I think it is a bit of a contradiction that that's applied . . . through this system and it's one that folks in the South participate in. . . . *now* anyway they participate in it and help design it, but I hope, it would be interesting at some point if a movement developed in the South to suggest that we in the First World should apply the same rules here. It's very dangerous for them to do that because it could affect their market share. . . . they could lose a lot of the companies that

are currently selling Fair Trade coffee so they probably wouldn't wanna do that. But there should be some kind of recognition of organizations in the North that are sort of modeling themselves or mirroring the values . . . and the contractual obligations that exist in the South in Fair Trade.

A move toward a more equitable and fair economic organization of society can only be achieved when the economy is no longer dis-embedded from social organization (Polanyi 1964). Worker co-ops in the North constitute an important shift toward such re-embedding of the economic in the social as they emphasize such important things as democratic decision making and “economic democracy” (Jeremy). The decision to structure Northern businesses democratically provides the basis for a more transparent and equitable partnership with democratically organized Southern producers.

Martyn, as a consumer, is interested in supporting local, independent, community based businesses (co-ops and others) which provide FT products and pay their employees a fair wage, as opposed to large corporate retail chains that only provide minimum wage to their local employees and sell FT products as a part of a good corporate market image. Martyn states: “I think we need to be more community-oriented and less of a corporate structured society.” He explains that “if a lot of these corporations begin to look at selling Fair Trade products while they do pay fair prices for this, they’re still managing to exploit it at, . . . the retail end by not, . . . treating their workers fairly so they can cut prices.”

While Jake’s business is not organized as a co-op, he refers to the importance of conducting Northern businesses in a “fair” way. As Jake notes, “everyone here’s treated equally. We don’t have and we never will have people drawing vastly superior salaries to others.” He further states: “I guess it’s always about not having – when it’s business in [city] – not having

sweatshop type conditions and making sure that you're paying a living wage, a fair price for the work that you're receiving." In terms of his business, Jake states:

It's paying a fair price to somebody whether that's monetary, whether, that's not choosing a man over a woman, or a woman over a man or a white person over a colored person it's what's fair, it's a fair way of doing business, it's a sort of business without any discrimination. So, you can discriminate economically, you can discriminate religiously, socially, culturally, . . . it's about what I would consider to be a just, fair way of working with people whether you're buying from them or selling from them or trading with them or paying them to provide a service. (Jake)

However, some interviewees noted that the co-operative structure of FT farmers presents a *limitation* of FT. Donna and Jim maintain that such "arbitrary criteria" limits the number of producers who can participate in the program and that one can "trade fairly" without being organized into a co-op. Ricki, Jim, and Donna point out that the requirement of co-op membership is a negative aspect of FT. Ricki states: "That's a negative thing, by the way, for the Fair Trade, cause you can't be an individual farmer, you have to be part of a co-op in order to be able to be certified Fair Trade." Jim states: "it seems to me that [a] small family farm that might have some number of employees that isn't incorporated into a co-op is just as valid a structure as one that isn't. So . . . some of the coffees we have are from farms and estates and therefore they're not allowed to be Fair Trade."

Some interviewees highlight the necessity of challenging the operations of Northern businesses that sell FT products, as it relates to employees and treating them fairly. There are variations on such fairness, with some interviewees emphasizing the benefits of Northern co-operatives. As it relates to democratically organized Southern FT producers, some interviewees believe this requirement is a limitation of FT as it excludes certain farmers, which has to do with how one interprets what constitutes a "fair" exchange and leads some interviewees to engage in other forms of ethical exchange outside of the FT certification system.

## **Relationships between Northern Sellers, Importers, Consumers & Southern Producers: Encouraging People to Think about Who is Involved in the Process of Coffee Production and Exchange**

Education about FT products (through product labeling, public forums, and education/awareness campaigns, for example) is extremely beneficial because it provides information to consumers about the conditions under which products are grown and produced and the low wages that many coffee farmers receive. FT products provide consumers with a choice when shopping. A label is placed on products in order to indicate that a product has been certified FT in accordance with international standards.

Strong (1997:35) suggests that “[t]he fundamental problem of translating fair trade principles in to [*sic*] consumer purchase behaviour is the barrier of consumer recognition of the human element of the ecological marketing agenda.” In an attempt to bridge the gap between consumers and producers and explain why it is important to purchase FT products, Nicholls (2002:15) points out that marketing strategies for FT rely heavily on detailing “individual producer ‘stories’” in an effort to “allow the individual consumer to feel a sense of ‘making a difference’, in order to secure a commitment to regular purchase behavior and develop brand loyalty.”

Many interviewees discussed FT’s important role in highlighting the connection between producers and consumers and the fact that producers deserve to be treated with dignity. Jasmine explains that “we need other people [FT orgs.] to remind us that there are human lives attached to the products that we buy and consume” due to the fact that “we always look out for ourselves”, suggesting that self-interest is the reason FT is necessary. Jasmine states: “as soon as you try to put a human face to the product, all of a sudden people start to pay more attention.” She offered the example of Nike being exposed for child labour and counteracting the accusation

with a campaign to insist that this is not the case. She wonders if “that need [will] ever go away for somebody like TransFair or Fair Trade to come in and make sure that . . . the standard of living doesn’t fall below a certain level? You’d like to think that it wouldn’t be needed but the reality is . . . we don’t have a very good track record.” In a later interview, however, she stated “who knows maybe the price of coffee will go up to a point where we don’t need Fair Trade production for farmers.”

Martyn is interested in supporting local businesses that sell FT products, especially those that are involved with their producers in a “relationship” as he believes it is “important” to “see who you’re helping”:

I wanna keep supporting people [local independent FT coffee shop] like that. . . they do a lot of community work. They go meet the people . . . they actually visit the co-operative where they buy the coffee from and they have a lot of community support work for them as well. They do a lot of fundraising on the side -- it’s usually for one of these co-operatives or communities in Central America. So, they are intimately in a relationship with their producers.

While Ricki suggested that direct involvement with coffee growers “would be a much more rewarding thing” than dealing with coffee brokers, he refers to the difficulties involved in doing so by explaining that his interest in providing a wide selection of coffee prevents him from being able to import a large shipment of one variety directly from one location. He is interested in knowing exactly which co-ops are benefiting from the FT coffee that he buys and sells as there is “more of a face to a product” which is “less esoteric, much more tangible.” In his experience it has been easier to find out from American coffee brokers the “co-op names, the region, what’s happening there, what they’ve done with it”, as opposed to Canadian brokers. Ricki states:

Canadian companies they’re . . . a little bit stone-faced that I want that information. ‘Cause again, people don’t ask for it. But I do and I want it. I want as much of that information as possible so I can relay that as much as possible to the individual consumer. So, they can make . . . interesting choices. I’d love to meet all of the farmers but I would be traveling around the world. . . . Maybe one day.



Keeping in line with interviewees' interest in knowing who produces the coffee and having a relationship, Jake visits the farms from which his business imports their coffee from, for various reasons, as he states: "Verification. Education. Relationship building." In terms of relationship building he states that the "supply chain is only as strong as . . . your relationship with a supplier." Jeremy refers to the benefit and necessity of the "supportive" relationship between consumers and producers that FT fosters because consumers learn where products come from and who produced them: "I think the marketing of Fair Trade, it really needs to have that relationship goin' on because . . . I think that's how we can be effective." For Jeremy, "one of the broad components of Fair Trade is reconnecting that social relationship or the moral relationship between production and consumption." He compares this to the "face-to-face capitalism which is a turn of the century sort of thing where you'd walk down the street to the baker and buy a loaf of bread and then go in next door to the butcher. *You knew these guys.*" He explains that "you had a relationship with the people who produced things and that created a moral bond and a reciprocal relationship often and that doesn't exist anymore." Explaining further the benefits of reconnecting producers and consumers, Jeremy recounted a pertinent example which illustrates the benefits gained when such connections are considered an important focus, emphasizing Jeremy's point that he thinks a major problem is that people are unaware, not that they are "evil." Jeremy introduced a visiting coffee producer to the manager of a supermarket that sells their coffee. The manager had never met anyone who produces any of the products that he sells, which highlights the 'disconnect' between people and the process of production, consumption and exchange:

That guy's gonna remember that farmer and he's gonna tell people about it when people are asking about coffee. He's gonna say, "Well, you see that coffee there, I happened to meet the guy that grows it" . . . That's what we need cause it's I think part of that distance

and that abstract relationship we have with the commodities that we consume that it *allows* for the exploitation to occur in the world. The closer you are to it then the more difficult it is to morally justify it.

Martyn refers to his interest in supporting businesses that fundraise for their producers.

Jeremy, Jim and Donna are involved in helping coffee producers during times of environmental devastation, as well as encouraging or enabling their consumers to do so, which highlights the very strong connection they have with their producers. For instance, in an effort to help FT co-ops in Central America who had been affected by mudslides, Jeremy's business gave free coffee to customers for a week who donated money to the FT co-op. Jeremy believes this is a way to bridge the gap between consumers and producers: "we wanna bring the reality home to people that they have a relationship with those folks there and so they should now cough up a couple o' bucks to help 'em out."

Donna and Jim spoke about their relationships with importers and producers: "it is a relationship and you do begin to get to know – even if it's through our importers, we know them." Jim and Donna's relationship with their producers made them want to help after an earthquake in a community where they get coffee from. They raised one thousand dollars from customer and staff donations and they contributed one thousand dollars as well. Donna noted that customers were happy to donate because Jim and Donna personally knew the people and that the money was needed and would be used. "[I]t was helpful to people [customers/staff] to have a connection, something that's more real" (Donna). Donna referred to the fact that relationships are more important than FT certification and also emphasized the importance of relationships, as distinct from the disconnected "value chain." She explained that their importers have been "working with the *same farms*" for "fifteen years" with the aim of "trying to take them out of poverty by *teaching them how to improve their crop.*" Donna and Jim frequently noted the

importance of relationships and “consistency” in terms of their dealings with producers. Donna noted that “sustainability is really served by having closer relationships with your producers of *whatever* and in this case coffee and, and the chocolate is the same thing.” They emphasize the importance of relationships:

RR [Donna]: . . . what’s important is . . . to move away from this commodities’ market . . . general, anonymous market thing where you have no idea, particularly where your food is coming from, where your clothes, where your *stuff* is coming from, right. You have relationships with the people who are producing your stuff, you’re gonna start doing the right things by them

R [Jim]: You’re gonna give them a fair price ‘cause you know who they are. See, it’s so easy to rip off someone you don’t know.

RR: and exploit them (Jim and Donna)

Jeremy’s involvement in FT is connected to his interest in getting to personally know some of the members of FT co-ops (which includes co-ops that they get coffee from or other successful FT co-ops). He travels to various co-ops and creates films about the coffee production process and the lives of the farmers. One of the videos contains information about coffee roasting, organics and FT which is used to explain their business to wholesale customers and the staff. Jeremy also produces videos about FT co-ops which he shows to various audiences when he speaks publicly about FT and he focuses on making an explicit connection between consumers and producers through visual portrayals of the daily existence of the coffee producers in need of money in order to provide for their families.

Feeling a sense of connection and obligation to assist is the result of feeling connected to the producers. Haley grew up in a country in which she was surrounded by coffee growers. Her main future goal is to make her business a chain and import coffee from her home country in Central America. She notes: “Maybe I shouldn’t be saying that because there’s other countries too that need help, but that’s where my roots are and I really wanna help out there.” She noted

that coffee from this country is “*very, very high quality*” and that many people are unaware of this because the “political instability” in the country has resulted in “buyers internationally” being unable to establish a “long term relationship” and unwilling to “risk” purchasing the coffee from that country. I asked Haley about why she chose to become involved in the sale of coffee, in particular:

well I chose coffee maybe because [Central American country] produces coffee and it's big in coffee so my dream now sometime down the line if I get like big enough to bring my own coffee, then I'll bring it from [Central American country]. So, that's what I wanna do. So, it's kinda like helping the people that I know. (Haley)

This section has highlighted that many interviewees referred to the importance of recognizing the connection, bond, and relationship between those that buy, sell, and produce coffee.

### **Connections, Community, Co-operation, & Competition**

One of the most important aspects of ensuring the continued success of social movements is to continually attempt to reach a wider audience, to network with other people involved in the movement, and to build a coalition of supporters. An increase in the amount of businesses providing FT products and increased sales of such products is undeniably a positive achievement for FT as a movement. However, what are the complicated aspects of FT products in a competitive capitalist economic organization of society? How does competition and co-operation between businesses affect the outcome of FT as a social justice movement? Who is being invited to participate in FT, by whom, and in what capacity? There has been progress over time in regards to co-coordinating the Canadian FT movement which has been very successful. A recent extremely beneficial contribution to networking within the movement is the founding of Canadian Fair Trade Network (CFTN 2004) and its associated listserv, co-founded in August 2004, as well as the Canadian Student Fair Trade Network (CSFTN 2005) and its separate listserv established in July 2005. The CFTN organized an event to be held at the Congress of

Humanities and Social Sciences at York University in June 2006 entitled: "Fair Trade: People, the Planet, and Profits" which will surely aid in the success of the movement.

As a consumer movement, FT leads to competition when businesses involved in the sale of FT products attempt to secure a competitive market niche. The following section will detail the co-operative and networking components of FT as well as its competitive aspects. Further, I will complicate the simple dichotomization of competition versus co-operation.

In their sale of FT and "fairly traded" coffee and chocolate, Jim and Donna are attempting to secure a market niche. While they believe that consumers' support for FT is beneficial regardless of whether they buy it from them, they want consumers to buy their coffee because they want to sustain their business. They suggested that it is problematic when people confuse FT as a brand and do not realize that it is the company that is the brand, while the FT certification is simply a certification. Donna explains that they are "adding value . . . not selling guilt":

so we aren't just saying come here [to business] because we think that you'll feel good because of all this good stuff. We're gonna give you something better so when somebody comes up to me and says, "Hey, I'm already buying Fair Trade coffee." To me that means nothing, right. Good for you, that's great, try ours, right. Because even if everybody's Fair Trade we still need to – and that would be *great*, right, *fantastic* – we still think we have a place in the market because . . . we've set ourselves up that way. We didn't just go out there trying to do this in what I would consider to be an unsustainable way which is please pay more for this and buy it from me because you'll feel better about it.

Jeremy discussed the benefits of FT coffee being available for sale in the local community, whether purchased from their business or from others because the expansion of the sale and awareness of FT products contributes to a "discourse" in the community by bringing "a different economic story to the community" which is "pretty upfront" due to the marketing approach that Jeremy takes in his business. He states: "a bunch of cafés in town buy our coffee. But a bunch of other cafés buy other people's Fair Trade coffee which is *good*. So, all of a

sudden a town where there was *no Fair Trade coffee* available brewed in a restaurant now there's probably like 15 or 20 places." Jeremy talked about the benefits of the availability of FT products acting as a starting point which "over time" will "hopefully" provide the gateway through which to engage people about related issues of co-ops, economic democracy, democratic organization of communities, reconnecting consumers to products, and understanding the importance of "paying the true value" for products; issues which Jeremy is actively involved in promoting.

Jeremy points to the combination of competition and co-operation that result from involvement with FT and notes that people involved with FT "tend to be thinkers" and "when you're sitting around with a bunch of people involved in Fair Trade you may even be competitors but you're kindred spirits in the sense that you're actually tryin' to tinker with things. . . . Fair Trade is such a *strange* thing. . . . with what's going on it's very contrary."

While one interviewee referred to the collaborative network of importers that his business is involved with, another interviewee refers to the challenges encountered when initially bringing FT coffee into his shop. At the time there was a "co-op group of independent companies" which were making FT coffee available in a particular city by "bringing in coffee independently" (Ricki). He suggests that "because there was another unnamed company in [city/province] that was part of that organization . . . they were not anxious to include me in it for fear that I would be a competitor." He states:

a more forward thinking approach would be well more people in the market, more awareness; more awareness, more people in the market--more consumers are aware, more consumers will buy. It kinda leads to that. But, unfortunately . . . you have idealist companies that join [FT] originally and their business and social philosophy is very protectionist and that is not necessarily, on a larger scale, very helpful to theoretically the cause. [Ricki]

The competitive aspect of FT as experienced by some interviewees suggests that there is a need to look more broadly at the challenges faced by those interested in FT in the context of a competitive capitalist economy. However, Jeremy interprets the competition from various businesses as a form of raising awareness and solidarity.<sup>20</sup>

### **Community: Reaching Out, Reaching In**

Why is it worthwhile for interviewees to be involved with FT for the local community? A common theme through many interviews is the importance of participating in FT in the local community, while the particularities of what constitutes a contribution varies in some ways. As well, one interviewee is actively involved in searching for assistance *from* the local community in order to succeed in assisting coffee producers. However, one interviewee pointed out that the focus of the business is more heavily on the coffee-producing countries as opposed to the local community.

Jeremy is very involved in engaging with the local community. His worker co-op where he works does not “give much money away because we don’t have it but we’re very generous with our coffee. So, if an organization is having an event we’ll give ‘em coffee and then people can taste it and hopefully like it and then find out about us.” Jeremy explained that this provides an opportunity to “engage that group in . . . Fair Trade, but also the ideas of quality and that maybe the best bread baked in [city] or that you can buy in [city] is stuff that’s been baked here as opposed to the stuff that’s baked lord knows where and shipped in a big transfer truck full of chemicals.” Jeremy is interested in supporting the local community. He also states: “if we can get people to understand what a worker co-op is and it’s successful then that’ll be a huge

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<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Jasmine and Martyn are interested in solidarity in the sense that they hope independent stores (as opposed to large chains) secure the market niche (as discussed in section on **Where and How to Expand the Fair Trade Market & Movement: Who are the Allies? What is the Motive?**).

benefit.” Jeremy states that they are “interested in participating” in the community in the sense of “being part of the scene, a part of the discourse, a part of the politics and also very supportive.” They provide free coffee to “the local youth homeless shelter and the food bank and we’re gonna start giving a lot of coffee to the local women’s shelters.” Jeremy’s co-op does not give money to organizations when they ask because they do not have it to give, nor do they “buy advertising.” He explains that “when people need something or usually when they come to us they’re looking for coffee and so the coffee is actually the least expensive thing for us to give away, really. It’s easier for us to give \$50 worth of coffee than it is to spend \$50 on an ad for example. . . . and it’s also good marketing. But also we think that it’s a better way to support the community.” Jeremy states: “Usually people spend money on coffee so it’s a way for them to save money and . . . they’re drinking really good coffee as opposed to the crap they had to buy before.”

Simon, Martyn, and Haley referred to the importance of involving more people in their approach to expand FT. Simon is involved in activism related to FT in his local community. Martyn is interested in possibly developing a larger network of people to this end. Currently he is involved with a group of “volunteers with very little financial support” who are activists in relation to FT. While they are affiliated with an NGO they “don’t really get much aid or support from them.” As such, he explained that his intent is to spend time “talking to the sort of main Fair Trade businesses . . . I would say pure Fair Traders and see how we can maybe expand” their FT volunteer group. He noted that this might entail setting up “another separate organization . . . which will be a little more autonomous and . . . [NGO] could be a partner in that and we’ll be a partner in that but it depends on how many people wanna support this.” He referred to the importance of developing a “Fair Trade network” in the city in which he lives as a



way to “expand” the work that the FT volunteer group is involved in. He explains that some of the difficulties involved in his role as coordinator of a FT volunteer group have to do with the fact that he typically has to deal with a “new batch of volunteers” every year as some people do not return. As such, he is taking a break from this role because he is “tired, burnt out” and is deciding whether he will take on this role in the future or “go back and say I’m gonna continue being a Fair Trade advocate.” He also states that the group’s website is a “good . . . education tool, so we probably wanna continue using it to list all of the places that sell Fair Trade products, maybe we’ll feature Fair Trade stores or retailers.” As a potential long-term goal, Martyn noted an interest in having a “Fair Trade shop” of his own but stated that it would be “in association with more activism . . . it’d be in relation to a Fair Trade organization. The coffee shop name or something like that would be a front. The back room would . . . have Fair Trade movies and Fair Trade presentations and stuff like that.”

Haley discussed the need for help in order to succeed with her mission to promote and expand FT and her business. She utilized a newspaper article in order to ask for help from the Spanish community “as a starting point” because she says that the “Spanish community is gonna understand better.” However, she is eager to “get help” from “wherever it comes” which could be outside of the Spanish community. As Haley is “willing to make sacrifices” to ensure she succeeds at reaching her goals, she is uninterested in people “coming on board because they wanna make money.” She is only interested in “people that have the heart, that understand, that’s their passion, that they wanna do it because they have the same goals that I have.” Haley says that customers are interested in her business succeeding and she mentioned that one had provided her with some websites to find out more information about FT. She explains that people are “very well-informed. They know what we’re offering and they appreciate it.” She

pointed out that customers are “*trying to help us!* Because they know that Fair Trade is a good thing and they all want to contribute and they want us to do well. And so I’m very fortunate to be in this area [location] believe me it’s just amazing.”

Ricki recounted the benefit of being located close to media because it provides a “much better chance for education and awareness” due to the fact that various people that work in media buy coffee from him every morning. He said that the media are “constantly looking for stories and here they have that information” and also they can have access to the “tangible” coffee, which is beneficial since when FT was a relatively new concept and it was in the media people did not have a place to be able to purchase the coffee.

Donna and Jim are very interested in issues related to “sustainability” and they are very interested in protecting the natural environment. As Donna states, “sustainability means sustainability and we live here . . . it doesn’t make sense to go and try and be sustainable somewhere else.” Donna continues by noting that “for the whole thing to make sense it has to be mainstream, right? Our mission can’t be accomplished . . . selling to the converted.” As such, Jim and Donna chose not to open their store in a place where there were already a large number of coffee shops<sup>21</sup>, because it was too far away from their home. As well, there is a particular natural resource located in their community that they value greatly and they are interested in improving the local area, in general. While they noted that most of the customers do not really “care about” the “values” and “sustainability” issues that they advocate, they do spend a lot of time talking to their customers and as Jim notes: “we are educating them, they are learning, and some of them are gettin’ it. . . . And the ones who come here often enough they get the story over and over again.”

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<sup>21</sup> They believe that if they had opened in a busier area, however, they would likely have more customers.

In contrast to other interviewees, Jake is not as involved in the local community and explains that his business is focused on “producing” countries. While he noted that they are involved “with local organizations that help new people coming to Canada get started with jobs here and learning English, that kind of thing, but we’re really mainly focused on the coffee.”

Jake explains:

the issues in the office and the community are more about fairness, I don’t see how you could see the effects of Fair Trade in a community, you can see products that are being *sold* that are certified Fair Trade, but, Fair Trade really works between a consumer ultimately and the producer and we’re and everyone mostly in [city] is not a producer, they’re definitely a consumer but the businesses are middlemen, right? Buying goods from the producer selling it to the consumer. I think it would be tough to see. (Jake)

Jasmine brought FT coffee into her store in order to satisfy customer demand in the local community. Referring to her conversations with customers, Jasmine explains: “people say, ‘Well, I’ll take Fair Trade if you have it so I can sleep at night.’”

Many interviewees are actively involved in various initiatives in the local community and raising awareness of it, with some taking a much more proactive role in the movement aspect as opposed to simply the market aspect.<sup>22</sup>

### **Dialogue and Communication with TransFair Canada**

It is important to dialogue with as many people as possible (both outside and inside the movement) in order to increase the success of the FT movement. Interviewees vary in terms of the form and quantity of contact they have with TransFair Canada. While all businesses that are licensees with TransFair Canada are audited and have to submit quarterly reports, interviewees highlighted other forms of contact with TransFair Canada. For instance, Martyn (FT consumer, activist) notes the importance of communicating with TransFair to note the necessity of raising

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<sup>22</sup> It is somewhat difficult to dichotomize the movement versus the market aspect of FT because by virtue of selling the product, one is essentially participating in the movement. However, the level of engagement in movement activism varies.

“public awareness” about what FT is and also “making sure that the Fair Trade symbol is not lost” in the sense that the FT logo needs to be promoted as the only form of FT. He notes “that’s the sort of feedback we give them. And I think that’s why they’ve got this . . . National Fair Trade Weeks happening is trying to get more public awareness and they need to work more with us or grass-roots groups all over the country.”

In contrast, Ricki highlighted the fact that he is “not directly involved with” TransFair Canada and notes: “I don’t sit in in their meetings and we don’t talk about policy and I don’t talk about like what they should be doing.” However, he states: “a brief conversation that I had with the head of TransFair Canada – it’s *very different* from province to province – just the awareness, the type of consumer, the willingness, it does vary.”

Jeremy is frequently in contact with TransFair to discuss various issues:

we went [to TransFair Canada AGM] and raised the issues again and . . . I see them all of the time, the TransFair people and we’re in communication because they are our regulatory body so, for sure. And the interesting thing about that TransFair Annual General Meeting . . . was that the companies were there were [names] and there was a couple o’ new guys and also [name of business] which is in [city]. Companies that are 100% Fair Trade and most of them are co-ops. . . . just looking at *who’s there* indicates where the commitment is to Fair Trade. . . . so I think that’s also fairly apparent to the TransFair people that there’s a group out there is doing this . . . for more than just developing in a market niche, it’s that we’re actually trying to transform economic relationships.

Jake’s business is in contact with TransFair Canada “probably once every three months” and he notes that TransFair Canada is interested in various things that his business is involved with: “they want us to help with Fair Trade certification in [country that Jake’s business imports coffee from], they want us to attend a certain event, they want this, they want that. Usually it’s what they want.” He explains further that TransFair Canada is “trying to promote their label and the organization so they need their licensees to support them and in places where *we’re* working that

they can't get a foothold in, they want our help. Sometimes we can help. Sometimes we can't."

Jake explains his respect for TransFair Canada:

They're [TransFair Canada] excellent. I'm not gonna say we haven't had any sort of heated arguments in the past but it's all about sort of educating one another and I think that they're excellent. They were the first in North America, they struggled with a lot of the same problems that other businesses do and they're a non-profit which is insufficient funding to effectively develop their programs and market them. They've persevered, they've improved, there's a lot more roasters on the [Fair Trade] register than there were in the past and the number just continues to grow. They've had some big successes in terms of getting some of the larger importers . . . licensed and roasters licensed and so they're well organized so, and doing more and more all the time.

Donna and Jim are more skeptical and questioning of FT than other interviewees and they talk at length about their reasons (see section on **Money, Time, and Effort by Fair Trade Licensees with Unsatisfactory Results in Ch. Four**). Jim and Donna take part in "fairly traded" initiatives that are completely separate from the FT certification process affiliated with TransFair Canada. Donna and Jim's interest in "trust" is related to their interest in building trusting relationships with their suppliers in a direct way. While they make it clear that they believe that FT certification is a "good" program, they have some reservations and concerns about the process. In contrast to other interviewees, Jim and Donna experienced some frustration with their dialoguing with TransFair Canada. They broached various issues of concern with TransFair, who suggested that they were very interested in talking with Donna and Jim, however, they did not receive satisfactory responses. Jim and Donna have an interest in TransFair being "a better partner." They state that if their concerns are not addressed they will "find it too onerous" to participate in the FT certification program through TransFair. However, they maintain that a potential disaffiliation with the FT certification process does not, by any means, suggest that they will discontinue participating in the "spirit" of trading fairly (i.e. in terms of their interest in their "fairly traded" initiatives which are unaffiliated with TransFair).

## Trade, Aid, Charity

A common theme throughout many interviews is the distinction between charity, aid, and trade. As noted in Oxfam's (2002:47) report, "the potential benefits of trade massively outweigh those associated with aid, even though development assistance has an important role to play." Oxfam (47) details the importance of a more fair international trade system that allows "poor countries and poor people to participate in markets on equitable terms." However, the Oxfam report also clearly highlights the importance of aid which "can play a vital role in enabling poor countries and poor people to participate in trade on more favorable terms." While Simon believes in the importance of providing aid, he notes the limitations of aid and the importance of recognizing the detrimental harm wrought on many countries because of trade that is not fair:

Absolute poverty is because of a number of issues, one of which -- one of the most important is unfair trading practices. It's not, you know, handing out aid generation after generation which we see only has a limited capacity to change things. It's . . . unfair trading practices that keep many, many nations from moving into a place where their economies are stable and their populations are living in some sort of dignity. (Simon)

Ricki states that "aid is needed" but, he has a strong belief that such aid does not necessarily end up reaching the people it is intended for due to the fact that "*most* of these social organizations in the end live to sustain themselves" and also because he does not believe that sending aid money to the "Third World" is "effective":

It [FT] assists and creates a much better living environment for the people that are toiling in the Third World. It doesn't deal with larger companies -- it's a much more democratic process . . . you have to be a co-op to be a member of Fair Trade. You can't be a large farm owner. And you're assisting small stakeholders. What is the best way of doing it? . . . Shall we send a hundred million dollars to Third World countries like Live 8 wants? Is that gonna be effective? I don't know. I mean, I personally don't think it's very effective because it's been done over and over and over again. (Ricki)

Ricki also states: “because of the fact that we’re [wealthy countries] awash in money and . . . guilt and limited in knowledge in brains, . . . the easiest thing is just to keep on giving money.” He suggests that this is “not necessarily the best” way to help people. Ricki distinguishes between giving and teaching. I believe that Ricki’s distinction between giving and teaching is similar to that between trade and aid. While my analysis of FT (**Ch. Two**; i.e. Doane and West 2004) suggests that farmers do not need to be “taught” how to grow the coffee in a sustainable way, Ricki maintains that teaching “them”, (i.e. farmers) how to farm sustainably is “effective.” He states: “My philosophy and it’s an old, old saying, I never invented it. Give a man a fish, he’s got food, for a day. Teach a man to fish and he’s got food forever.” He suggests that FT is beneficial because it is more closely aligned with “teaching” and providing “a system where they can continuously” participate, as opposed to giving people things, such as money (his example is the Live Aid for Africa as something that is “great” but “not effective” because it’s “not creating an environment where they can sustain themselves.”). Ricki believes that “small-scale” projects such as FT, as “a little thing that’s being done and it makes a minor dent in the global inequality” is similar to the benefits that are gained by small loans from the Grameen Bank, for instance. He explains that “it doesn’t necessarily take that much to bring up their [people in Third World] living standards. It’s only a couple of things. Clean water, health clinic and an educational system or a schooling system” and that “sometimes . . . smaller organizations . . . make the impact.”

Similar to a discussion of monetary aid is that of charity. Donna and Jim pointed to the distinction between giving people charity as opposed to engaging in fairly traded exchanges in which the product received has added “value” and as such, deserves more money in return. As Donna notes, “the way that we believe sustainability should work, [is] by actually providing

value, right. Not just saying, 'Hey, for charity purposes, let's just pay more for this than I can get it over here,' but actually having the whole thing add value."

Jim and Donna recounted a "horrible" situation--they learned about a group of farmers (not affiliated with FT) given aid money in order to plant coffee trees but not also provided with the necessary additional information about how to mill or market the coffee and as such left with nothing due to the lack of a "long-term" "relationship" with the people. Donna noted that this story points to the importance of "trade not aid" and not "abandon[ing] people." Jim explained that, "we give all this aid and where's it going" and highlighted the importance of "starting from the ground up and with what they have already and maybe going out of your way to buy something from them. . . . cause what's worse about *that* story is that *that money* could have been used for something that would've made perfect sense for them. . . it's taken resources *away* from something that probably would have made sense." Donna notes sarcastically, "we [North] know so much about what everybody else oughta be doing." Donna and Jim referred to the importance of trade as opposed to aid in stating:

we up here in the North and the West shouldn't be sitting here and not trading -- the only way that the people in developing countries are ever gonna have anything close to the standard of living we have -- they'll probably never have anything close, but the least coming up to -- is to trade with them, right? And you have to buy things. You can't just go in there and take out the iron ore and bring it up here to Canada and make something out of it. (Jim)

Martyn noted his preference for engaging in the purchase of FT products as a more "direct" way to help as opposed to donating money. He noted that often the people most in need are denied access to the aid money due to corrupt governments and as such he prefers to buy and support FT products as opposed to donating money to "some charitable foundation that you have no idea where that money goes." Marytn also states:



[name of NGO & campaign] clearly shows that for every dollar that we give them in aid they are losing two dollars in trade because they are being exploited either because they are being restricted in what they can export to countries like us or they are being tariffed because they want to protect the local market. Yet, we want them to buy everything we wanna sell to them. So, that, I think is unfair.

Martyn refers to the fact that a “living wage” is a predictor of a better life as he states: “If you can’t get a living wage you are going to be stuck in the same rut. Your kids won’t go to school, you can’t get medical aid, you’re sick, your kids don’t grow up properly, can’t go to school and hence maybe become more involved in the community. . . . I think it’s [FT] a great way of doing social justice.” Martyn noted that he does not deny the importance of the work of many NGO’s but rather that aid money may not be distributed properly when it arrives at the destination. For Martyn, FT activism is personally satisfying:

. . . it’s Fair Trade that got my interest for me--more *actively* interested as a volunteer . . . I could say, oh, yeah, I donate money but that’s only been something I did once a year . . . but to be involved is a lot more um, satisfying, it’s spiritually more satisfying than not knowing what you do when you give some money. And I’m hoping that it [activism] will continue. In what shape or form it depends, time will tell. (Martyn)

Jasmine points out that with FT products, the customer actually gets something tangible in return for their money. Jasmine’s highlights that FT is a “regulated” system of trade and people are convinced that the money is getting to the farmers and, as well, the customer gets a package of coffee, which may encourage more people to support FT, as opposed to donating money:

Fair Trade coffee . . . has become very in your face and I think that’s why it’s successful as well, coffee’s everywhere so it can have more of an impact because people are out drinkin’ it. Otherwise . . . how do you educate the public to part with their dollars that they’ve spent so much time trying to put in their pockets? . . . If somebody calls you up . . . *whatever* organization it happens to be . . . you’re thinking, “O.k., am I gonna get a tax receipt? Is that \$25 really gonna do anything? Or, do I even wanna make this donation with my after tax dollar?” Whereas when you come in and you buy a pound of Fair Trade coffee, *you get to keep the pound of coffee, right?* (laugh). Think about it. You’re kinda gettin’ something for your money. Whereas if

you just write a cheque . . . I think maybe there's a little bit of this how-much-money-is-really-getting-to-the-people-that-need-it attitude.

Noting that FT is an "excellent way" to "help" Jasmine believes that "there are lots of ways that you can support less fortunate or impoverished nations in the world -- you don't *have to do it by buying a pound of coffee*." Jasmine notes that "everybody wants to do good and everybody wants to help. A lot of people don't have time to volunteer. A lot of people don't know what else to do -- it's a small way of helping on on-going basis." She compares the contribution of FT coffee to donating money to people in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and explains that people "feel *terribly guilty* if they're not helping because *we* [Canadians] *know* we're so lucky and we feel powerless to help these people ["Third World" coffee growers]." Also, she explains that the reason people are unwilling to donate money to Katrina victims is due to an "attitude difference." She states: "The attitude is I don't know, we think that either, we don't like the Americans or that the Americans have enough money that they should help themselves. Like why don't we have this feeling that aren't those people helpless right now?"

### **Fair Trade & Immediacy**

Many interviewees believe that FT is an effective way to help people directly and immediately. While not denying the importance of other long-term initiatives for poverty reduction such as petitions, lobbying efforts, and changing international trade practices, many interviewees note their interest in FT because of its immediate impact on people's lives. For Martyn, FT is "a way to help people directly." He distinguishes the act of purchasing FT products from giving "money to organizations" and states: "I'm not so sure that money actually goes to the people directly. I mean maybe [name of organization] does do something directly for a particular family but by supporting a Fair Trade co-op, by giving them a fair price for all the Fair Trade -- all the farmers, it's doing *ten times* as much." Martyn referred to the effort of an

NGO to garner support to persuade the WTO to “tighten up some of the unfair trade practices.”

While he believes this is a laudable initiative, he emphasizes: “but it’s gonna be a very long and slow process but right now there are people starving in the world cause they can’t get . . . a adequate price for their coffee, their cocoa, their bananas and they need help immediately.”

Jeremy states: “We can say the WTO needs to recognize the Third World countries’ concerns around tariffs and trade subsidies but you could also just go out and buy a pound of coffee. . . . one is a much more long-term . . . who knows whether it’ll work or not kinda thing, whereas buying a pound of coffee is actually affecting somebody’s life immediately.” Jeremy emphasizes his interest in taking concrete actions as opposed to merely talking about doing things. He likes FT because when people purchase a bag of FT coffee “an economic transaction that occurs . . . that’s gonna change things.” Jeremy explains that his participation in FT is because of it’s immediate beneficial impact:

I’m impatient to a certain extent, so, Fair Trade does provide some immediate gratification (laugh) and I don’t think that you should necessarily not do all that other stuff [e.g. petitions and lobbying] but in the world where you have to make choices and I have to make mine . . . I’ve decided to go into business and try to sell Fair Trade products.

I: So you don’t do that other kind of stuff, like?

R: Well, I don’t lead the charge kind of thing . . . but I will support anything that attempts to change the world in a way that I think is useful . . . I’m just saying that as a focus activity I think that instead of lobbying to change structures we just have to create structures, new structures and Fair Trade is one of those new structures. (Jeremy)

Jeremy contrasts “social justice” work that is “reactionary” with FT as “proactive”:

It [FT] creates an elaboration of sort of what we would like to be as opposed to a critique of what is and that is a really important component in the social justice movement because we do spend so much time critiquing and reacting and so much time losing battles that Fair Trade is one of the few concrete activities that people can participate in directly that reflects their values if they’re interested in social justice. . . . Not only because it is a constructive action, but also. . . helps people believe that there are possibilities . . . that there’s hope. It’s kind of enchanting in the sense that it’s a real thing that’s goin’ on changing lives . . . I really think it’s *very* important. . . . I’ve been involved in the social justice movement for *years* and the issue has always been that people get discouraged and this is one way to encourage them and so as a result I spend less and less of my time

reacting and . . . more and more of my time trying to build things that are alternatives and constructive. . . the question that I always ask is, "I understand what your problem is and I understand where the injustices lie, but what's your reconstructive vision? What does it look like when we start to re-build and why the hell aren't you doin' it now?"

FT provides interviewees with the opportunity to effect positive change immediately through the purchase of a FT product.

### **Social Location**

Two interviewees noted their positions of privilege and how it impacts how they interpret their place in the world and the results of that positioning. Simon noted that as a "white middle-class male" he "easily" is "in the top five percent" out of six billion people on the planet and perhaps even "the top two or three" percent. When discussing this, Simon recounted an experience (unrelated to FT) which alludes to his "positioning" in which he notes: "I realized that from my perspective as noble and as egalitarian and democratic as I wanted to be it could have a *completely different distorted* impact in the lives of real people and I needed to be wise about that." He commented further that he is not discouraged from continuing to work for social justice but states:

if I get more political about this -- and you're bound to -- you start talkin' to politicians you're gettin' political. There's gonna be some fairly interesting oppositional points of view that I'll run into. So, it's not something to be taken lightly in that context. You're talkin' about takin' profits and not only just a few dollars or a few hundred bucks, you're talkin' about taking millions and re-locating it somewhere (laugh), o.k.? And that's a . . . powerful and profound project. (Simon)

Simon's experience exemplifies how he has been able to easily incorporate the purchase of FT products into his daily life without going bankrupt:

there's a tension, because I have a limited amount of capital to spend and I have . . . expenditures, I have mortgages, bills, and interest money on the debt that I carry and all of that--geo-political concerns impact me and my pocketbook *but* I balanced that tension with beginning with the worst trade practices that I can find out about . . . buying no sweat clothing and buying fairly traded products. At least I can do

something about that on a day-to-day basis without losing my home or going into bankruptcy. These are not huge shifts in my family's and my personal economy.

Simon explains that socially just actions are "at least a contribution that each of us as an individual can make and if all the individuals in a position to do something about that decided that it would change, it would change overnight." This signifies the issue of "position" and the power associated with it. "*Many, many* people feel helpless and powerless and I don't. In fact, I see that single individuals can create massive changes." However, while it appears that Simon is arguing that his social location signifies his responsibility to take action, it also appears that he believes that "individuals", in general, can create change, perhaps not necessarily largely dependent upon their "position"/social location.

Jeremy referred to the fact that his privileged position requires him to participate in FT. He states that as:

a white guy living in Canada I am one of the most powerful people on the earth . . . if there's . . . five billion people on the earth, I'm in the top hundred million or whatever, in terms of power so there's almost a responsibility to involve yourself in this struggle and in this discourse because I live in tremendous privilege and comfort and no matter how bad my life gets it'll never get anywhere near as bad as some of the people I've met and some of the people who have struggled and risked their lives to do what I can easily do here.

While Jasmine did not emphasize her position of privilege in the same way, her emphasis of the necessity of Canadian people who "just have so much" to donate money and "give back" is related to her perception that the social location of, not only herself, but that of all "Canadians" warrants a necessity to contribute. For instance, Jasmine is clear in her belief that there are very few people in Canada that cannot afford to contribute financially in some way: "I think everybody has it in them. . . . ten dollars. I'm sorry. Very, very, very few people in Canada have less than (laugh) what you see on TV in some of those other countries."

Issues of class are clearly prevalent.<sup>23</sup> Some interviewees' feelings and realities of a privileged social location have encouraged them to require themselves to act accordingly. As such, this theme highlights a contradiction with that of **Cost-Sensitive Consumers & the Inequities of Class (Ch. Four)** as it appears that those in positions of class privilege have decided that they have a responsibility to participate in the purchase and/or sale of FT products. However, Simon's experience, in regards to cost/price is that it does not seem to be a particularly relevant issue (discussed in further detail in the context of **Ch. Four**)

### **Child Labour**

Three interviewees (Simon, Haley, Ricki) talked about the importance of the absence of child labour in general. Simon and Haley are both concerned about the rights of children. Simon's interest in purchasing FT chocolate is related to children's rights: "I will continue . . . to advocate that it [FT chocolate] be available [at workplace] and bring it into my courses about, 'Hey, do you even know these products exist? Often children are exploited picking cocoa beans.'" He states the following in relation to girls' education and poverty:

A lot of times when a family is too poor to send all of their children to school it's the girls that don't go. And they're discriminated against in a lot of developing countries and in a lot of cases their families are trying to make a living growing commodities that come our way. So, what happens relative to the issue of fairly traded products is discriminatory practices against girls in terms of their access to education. (Simon)

When growing up, Haley witnessed the disadvantages wrought on her classmates who often missed school in order to work. One of the main reasons she supports FT is because it guarantees that there is no child labour: "they [TransFair Canada] send their inspectors there and make sure all the farmers that are in this cooperative that they follow all this standards. . . . they guarantee that there's no child labour." Ricki refers to the labour practices in regards to

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<sup>23</sup> Issues of "race"/racism and gender are clear here as well but I neither explore nor analyze this in this thesis.

children and FT: “do you wanna pull out your four-year-old kid to help you farm the land or would you rather send your four-year-old kid to school.”

Four interviewees (Jake, Donna/Jim, Martyn) voiced their opinion that FT is beneficial because of the lack of child labour, but they distinguished between that which can be considered exploitative child labour and non-exploitative help from children as family contributors. These interviewees noted that while child labour which is forced, exploitative, disallows them to go to school, and/or denies them such things as “dignity” and “respect” is highly inappropriate, this differs qualitatively from children who, as a family member, help out (i.e. as a family chore combined with school). One interviewee has witnessed such forms of children’s contribution while visiting FT coffee farms. FLO (2005g:20) certification guarantees that “forced labour” and that which leads to children’s mal-development is unacceptable and children “may only work if their education is not jeopardised.” (see Appendix for FLO’s regulations regarding child labour).

Jasmine seemed to be referring to the lack of child labour when she noted: “I mean a lot of it too it’s about keeping kids in school and . . . educated.” She also referred to how FT is better for women: “making it better for women who do *a lot* of the work.”

I assume that Jeremy would also have a related stance on child labour in line with the FT standards regardless of the fact that he did not explicitly concentrate on the issue but he did note that a person in the low-income sector in Canada “relies on child labour in China for the clothes that her kids are gonna wear because she can’t afford it any other way.”

Clearly, some interviewees focus more heavily and are interested in the connection between FT and child labour than others.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an analysis of some of the benefits encountered and perceived by those involved with FT. Here I will summarize my key findings. Interviewees find it worthwhile to participate in FT because it allows them to feel that they are making a contribution to a better world for Southern producers through their daily actions, with some more engaged with it than others. Some point to the marketability of FT. Jasmine's perspective is distinct from other interviewees. (However, I argue that Donna and Jim's continued participation as sellers of FT coffee, despite challenges and criticisms of the program, is similar to Jasmine's in the sense that they highlight that the logo carries "market recognition" [i.e. increases sales], just as Jasmine pleasing her customers by selling FT increases her business sales by maintaining her customer base.) However, Jim and Donna did not *initiate* the sale of FT products *because of* consumer demand, as Jasmine did.

FT provides the ability for sellers to act as facilitators of social justice in their role of providing FT products to consumers and/or providing an outlet for producers to put their end product.

FT provides consumers with the ability to exercise their agency in an ethical way through the purchase of FT products and engagement with it. This provides consumers with a sense of power and control over their actions. Such actions are indeed influential in regards to the power of individuals to create social change as it relates to consumer "choice" and other political actions. As I insist throughout this thesis, positive actions, even a small act (the purchase of FT coffee), should not be discredited as such acts are the building blocks to a progressive and ethical organization of society. However, while individuals can absolutely 'make a difference', I argue that it is only when a large number of people engage in social justice activism and pressure that



the organization of society can change in a dramatic and expansive way. The act of a consumer voting with her/his dollar is an act of individual agency. Emphasizing such action is related to the belief that one person can make a positive impact by choosing to purchase a FT product or encouraging a store to offer FT products. Such individual actions are significant and important. As Simon notes, “*one or two individuals*” can create social justice changes when action is taken. However, while individual actions, indeed, are/have the potential to be powerful, I argue that because individuals are members of society, ideas and actions do not exist in isolation, and often things change because of the efforts of numerous people (who may know each other and work on justice initiatives together, or who may be part of a broader movement but do not know each other personally). Simon, also, discusses the benefits of collaboration in reference to some successful activism in relation to FT he was involved in: “institutionally and within an organization sometimes you have more power than individually.” (A particular business was “not willing to serve Fair Trade coffee” for a campus group, who expressed their disdain, and then subsequently changed the location of their group meeting so that they were able to “access Fair Trade coffee” from another business who agreed to provide it.) Also, the decision of Jasmine to begin to sell FT coffee was due to pressure from her *customers* (not *one* customer). People who are interested in consuming FT products and participating in the FT movement are aware that they are not the only individual taking part in such activities. While it was likely the case that individual consumers approached Jasmine on separate occasions and encouraged her to sell FT coffee, if only one or two people had asked, she would not have had the customer base to push her to sell it. The same applies to other businesses that sell FT products. If the customer does not buy it, it will not be offered. The point is that individual actions are often linked (knowingly or unknowingly, explicitly or inexplicitly) to other individual and/or group action.

There is room for the FT market to expand as interviewees highlighted their interest in various product developments in this respect. The “mainstream” status of organic certification, combined with FT, indicates the connections highlighted by interviewees between the success of each of these certifications. Interviewees’ experiences vary in their reasoning for combining FT with organic. While many interviewees believe that consumers are more aware of organic than FT, this is not a consistent belief between all interviewees. Some believe that the mainstream status of organic certification provides an opportunity to expand the FT market. Some argue that consumers affiliate organics with personal health and that FT is a ‘different level’ as it expands beyond self-interest to an emphasis on solidarity with people involved in production.

All interviewees who are engaged in FT trust the certification process and its benefits for producers. However, some interviewees are engaged in additional forms of trust-building with their customers and producers. In a discussion of the “dis-embedding” of the economy from social organization (as related to Polanyi’s work) within the “global market economy,” O’Hara and Stagl (2001:543-545) draw attention to Community Supported Agriculture projects as a “local alternative” (while noting that this is one of many alternatives) that “seeks to re-establish a sense of reliability and trust.” While the FT certification system and its involvement with coffee cannot be considered a “local” alternative for Northern consumers because: 1) FT products are not grown in Canada and; 2) producers and consumers do not physically meet to exchange the product, I argue that FT can be seen in a similar way as an alternative “direct marketing schem[e]” that is part of the “trend to regain a degree of reliability and trust” (O’Hara and Stagl 2001:544). I am focusing on O’Hara and Stagl’s (2001) use of the word “direct.” Raynolds (2002b:415) explains that “Fair Trade coffee networks socially re-embed commodities, so that items arrive at the point of consumption replete with information regarding the social and

environmental conditions under which they were produced and traded.” Practically, this “direct” connection is somewhat abstract. However, due to the fact that FT products contain information about how the product was produced and by whom, this serves as a way of connecting consumers and producers in a more direct way than products exchanged and consumed through dominant commodity networks.<sup>24</sup> Some companies, such as Starbucks, engage in forms of ‘ethical’ trade that is unaffiliated with the FT certification process. I argue that because there is no independent certifier auditing the trade of coffee by Starbucks it is difficult to determine how “fair” such trading is. I argue that the FT certification process is beneficial because of the fact that it is an independent non-profit organization and as such, differs greatly from the role of a powerful corporate business that may or may not put the interests of coffee producers at the forefront of their business decisions.

All interviewees are encouraged by the fact that FT achieves a form of poverty reduction for producers. I argue that any form of a rich-poor gap is neither inevitable nor desirable. I think one of the main benefits of FT is its focus on reducing the poverty of Southern producers.

I argue that Jeremy highlights one of the *most important* aspects of FT involvement for Northern businesses. If FT is to expand beyond a market niche and is to become more than simply another product, discussion and action related to FT must include thinking expansively about the problems with the organization of the global economy. In contrast to Jasmine’s emphasis on the variety of ways that people can ‘make a difference’, I argue that FT is one of the most important organizations to support because of its role in challenging the organization of the capitalist “relations of production” (Hudson and Hudson 2003, 2004). However, some interviewees perceive requirement of co-ops for FT coffee producers as a limitation of the certification process as it prevents certain people in need from being involved. While this does

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<sup>24</sup> The work of Barndt (2002) follows the path of tomatoes through the commodity chain.

appear to be the case, I argue that the FT process is working towards a more just working situation for producers and they cannot include everybody immediately because such things take time.

FT's role in connecting consumers and producers through relationships is an extremely beneficial component of the movement as it relates to "commodity fetishism." I argue that this is one of the most important components of FT as it emphasizes the global links between people. People-to-people linkages are tremendously important in order to challenge dominant forms of market exchange in which "commodity fetishism" prevails (Hudson and Hudson 2003). As stated above, citing Marx, Hudson and Hudson (415) state: "Commodity fetishism is the tendency, in a capitalist commodity system, for social relations between people to appear as a relationship between things." They (414) suggest that "[a]lternative trade attempts to remove the veil obscuring these social relations, and though it must confront contradictions created by the capitalist organization of production and exchange, it offers a starting point for the erosion of commodity fetishism."

I have also highlighted both the co-operative and competitive aspect of FT involvement. Ricki was deemed as a competitor by another company involved in FT coffee and according to him, this lessens the ability for the expansion and promotion of FT as a "cause." I argue that such competition is largely unavoidable due to the fact that FT is a primarily a consumer movement and exists within capitalism. However, I believe it is important to challenge and discuss the competitive market aspect of FT involvement in order to reduce it and move toward eliminating capitalism, as FT cannot expand dramatically within a capitalist system.

Some interviewees are also involved in networking and connecting with other players in the movement (such as in the local community and dialoguing with TransFair Canada) in order

to contribute to a sense of solidarity, collaboration, and create further expansive achievements. Jake is focused more heavily on the producers as opposed to the local community and appears to be focused on being as successful a business as possible in order to increase benefits for producers. I argue that the generosity of Jeremy's business is commendable, and hugely beneficial for particular community organizations which do not then need to spend limited funds on coffee purchases. However, it is likely that such organizations are in great need of money. Yet, because Jeremy's business needs to work to ensure that they are able to financially sustain themselves, perhaps the kindness of Jeremy's co-op will inspire large corporations, with massive amounts of financial capital, to provide necessary funding for community organizations, such as women's shelters.

While all licensees have contact with TransFair in regards to auditing, reporting, etcetera, an interest in participating in dialoguing seems to not be practiced by those who are simply involved as a seller/provider of FT products for the consuming public. The interviewees who are most engaged in FT activism and the movement aspect are in more close and frequent dialogue with TransFair. Some of this contact involves critical discussion and disagreement, which I argue is extremely beneficial as it relates to people voicing their concerns and challenges in order to potentially address such issues. The very fact that such contact is broached indicates a sincere interest in understanding and improving FT.

The distinction between trade, aid, and charity indicates that many interviewees believe that trade is an extremely beneficial approach to assisting producers, as opposed to merely donating money, as the purchase and/or sale of FT products provides a tangible and immediate ability to create positive change. I argue that engaging in FT is important as it provides the benefit of empowerment for producers, as opposed to being passive recipients of aid money,

which may serve to disempower people. However, I do believe that giving aid money is a form of redistribution that is extremely necessary for rich countries and corporations to engage in. As such, I argue that both aid and FT are important. Yet, of prime importance is ensuring that the interests and needs of those living in poverty are met on *their* terms, as they are most knowledgeable about what is needed in order for them to live a productive and enriching life.

Recognition of one's privileged social location confirms one's responsibility to participate in initiatives such as FT for some interviewees. While Jasmine's standpoint is largely valid for people who are privileged with the available income to be able to financially contribute to various social justice initiatives, I argue it is problematic to assume that merely because someone is a Canadian that they are situated in a more privileged social location.

Some interviewees highlight the benefit of the absence of child labour involved in FT.

It is important to encourage any business to make the switch or begin to offer the choice of FT. Nonetheless, I argue that activist energy may dissipate, falter, and become discouraging if the focus is only on powerful corporations. Also, without consumer demand to back up such inclusion of products by business, it will not occur. As highlighted throughout, consumer purchases are inter-connected with many factors, one of the main ones of which is affordability by nature of living in a capitalist society where one must have access to money to survive.

The success of FT largely depends on effective dialogue and communication between all of the various actors and organizations presently involved in FT globally. Northern advocates, sellers, and consumers of FT are some of the key people that must be included in such discussions. TransFair Canada, the non-profit organization which certifies and audits FT in Canada, is a key player in the FT movement. **Chapter Four** considers issues related to

challenges and limitations of FT and, involvement with it, from the perspective of various actors in the North.

## **Chapter Four: Challenges and Limitations of Fair Trade**

In this chapter I will do two main things: 1) highlight and analyze challenges and limitations of FT and of being involved with it and; 2) highlight and analyze challenges and limitations of FT which interviewees may not have referred to as challenges and/or limitations but which became clear through my research and analysis. This chapter addresses my second research question: How do people understand and deal with any challenges or limitations associated with their involvement with FT?

I explore and analyze such issues as FT and capitalism; FT as a norm or limited market niche; cost-sensitive consumers and the inequities of class; the necessity of funding and money for FT business and organizations; limited availability of FT products; the issue of where and how to expand the FT market and movement as it relates to allies and motives; governing of the use of “Fair Trade” phrase and use of the FT logo; defining FT, fair trade, and fairly traded; classifying FT as one component of sustainability as opposed to FT encompassing sustainability; competition from other “ethical” certification initiatives; efforts with unsatisfactory results as it relates to FT involvement; emphasizing product-quality with the FT “message” as secondary; education and awareness-raising and; issues related to FT as an imposed structure on Southern producers.



## Fair Trade & Capitalism

Jeremy believes that waiting for capitalism to self-destruct is not the best option considering the fact that people can presently take action which can positively affect people's lives:

some people say that capitalism will collapse. Ah, lord knows (laugh). I mean Marx said that. And that we'll be back to that kind of face-to-face relationship again because it'll be the only way we can survive. But I don't think we necessarily need to wait for that to happen because in the process of that happening a lot of people are gonna get hurt and that's just not nice and fair so we should be trying to figure this stuff out now if we see these inequalities and we see these problems we should just be dealing with them now instead of waiting for the violent overthrowing of capitalism where it's a bloodbath and *maybe it might not happen*. So, let's just do what we think is *right* as opposed to sitting back . . . like it's on TV . . . and not participating.

Jeremy highlights the fact that FT "does *exist* in contemporary capitalist society" and utilizes some aspects of capitalism, while it is in contrast to other components (which is in line with my argument that FT is a semi-alternative to Free Trade and capitalism). As Jeremy emphasizes, FT is in opposition to capitalism because it is based on "redistribution" as opposed to profit accumulation and provides the realization that there is a better way to "have economic relationships":

[Fair Trade] goes against everything that we're taught about capitalism and about business and so that, whenever you challenge people and make them think about new things in new ways then it can create new things . . . it's like that dialectic can occur and so that's a cool thing about Fair Trade is that it is a contrarian movement and . . . out of it could come who knows what so that's kind of like that other question about transforming the world is . . . this discourse now exists within business -- it's a very small discourse, but it's there . . . Some people dismiss it, other people think it's crazy, other people think it's just a marketing ploy, but when people actually think about it and try to figure out exactly what it means then that can bring about new opportunities and changes, . . . in relationships . . . it's a positive thing for sure, all around.

He also points out that with FT we need to be "realistic that we're not transforming the global economy." While referring to the fact that FT allows "the left" to explicitly refer to what it is

that they are in favor of, he points out that “[o]ne of the problems with a lot of the reconstructive vision of . . . the left is that they’re *small things*. They’re things that work on small scales, they’re not giant things. . . . which is kind of the way the world works now, it wants it to be huge or not at all.” He argues that FT is “an experiment within capitalism” which is beneficial because FT is “a way to show people that there are other ways of having an economy that . . . we can use all the things that we have from capital -- all the tools, accounting, corporate structures . . . but *they don’t have to screw people* and they don’t have to make some people *really* wealthy and other people *really* poor.” He suggests that such a viewpoint would be understood by others as “anti-capitalist.”

While Jake and Martyn did not refer specifically to capitalism they are certainly troubled by the organization of the global economy. Jake voices his contempt with the structure of the market determining the cost: “I don’t like this whole commodity business. . . . price of something shouldn’t be determined by a world market.” Martyn discussed the problems encountered in relation to price speculating done by large coffee corporations who “are trading numbers on a computer screen.” Simon explains that large corporate franchises have the capital to be able to purchase coffee years in advance in order to “*guarantee* that there will be coffee sitting in their warehouses” and suggests that “one of the largest, if not the largest, structural reason for global poverty is the way that capitalism runs in the world.” These “speculative adventures” do not “have anything to do with the [coffee] grower” and the prices are based on what they anticipate the coffee will be worth in the future which, of course, leads to poverty for many coffee growers.

Capitalism *requires* that the needs and interests of the majority are subordinated to interests of profit maximization. There is a “contradiction between (real) democracy and

capitalism” (McNally 2002:196). McNally (2002:193-194) explains “the secret of capitalist ‘democracy’”:

it involves a dramatic contraction in the public sphere and the range of public powers. Major questions related to the distribution of property, the ownership of resources, and the allocation of wealth are now defined as issues of private economic life, best left to the market (where private individuals pursue their self-interest, free of public interference). With the ‘expulsion of politics’ from these spheres, the ambit of democracy has been radically reduced. More than this, democracy has been emptied of its original content – which referred to the absolute sovereignty of the people – and refilled with liberal doctrines of individual (property-based) rights.

Capitalism is not a democratic form of social organization and the capitalist marketplace is not a space in which FT will fluidly become the “norm” through market mechanisms. While FT is not an attempt to eradicate markets (Jaffee, Kloppenburg, and Monory 2004:192), it does aim to apply ethical regulations and standards to the market. Such aims contradict “free market” principles. In this sense, FT is a challenge to capitalism. I agree with Susan George’s (2004:99) statement: “I don’t believe that capitalism has or can have a human face.” In line with George’s (2004) argument, I do not believe that it is necessary to first abolish capitalism in the form of a global “revolution” in order to achieve successes toward a world without capitalism. As George (99) states, the goal “is to create spaces in which humans and nature can thrive, to make demands on the present system and force it to respond, to find the contradictions in it and heighten them, to bend it until it either gives way or snaps.” In line with this, George (98) points out that we should not “discount” partial “reforms” because: “Capitalism will be shaken as a result, from a thousand different blows to its foundations. But we cannot say when and we cannot discount any efforts, even indirect ones, to that end.” FT is a reform strategy aimed at redistribution. It is one of many strategies developed in order to bring some justice to the world for Southern producers.

## Fair Trade as the Norm or Limited Market Niche?

One of the limitations in regards to the sale of FT products is that the market can only secure a limited niche. As Nicholls and Opal (2005:230) point out, while the “largest markets for Fair Trade” exist in Europe, these markets “may be approaching saturation point, especially in heavily branded products like coffee.”

Two interviewees express their belief that FT coffee will become “the norm.” Ricki believes that FT coffee is “eventually gonna be very much in the mainstream – major companies will do it – no doubt about it. But, right now just sort of nibbles of small companies throughout Canada . . . are doing their part.” Reflecting upon his attendance at a “grocery show” Ricki stated that there are “way more [FT] products [cocoas, sugars, coffees] out there than were in previous years.” He thinks that “pretty soon” FT coffee will be the “only” coffee and it will be “everywhere.” Jasmine states that “once it [FT] becomes *the thing to do* corporations will start to get greener and start to pay more attention . . . *my hope* is that organizations like Fair Trade -- as grassroots organizations -- will garner enough support over time that it will become the norm and it would be abnormal to buy regular coffee.” However, in a second interview, when I asked her to expand on this she slightly altered her position and explained that some farmers are already receiving “more than a fair price” for coffee, on the conventional market, which she argues is sufficient (i.e. FT is not necessary) and that such “world class coffee” will always exist. She suggests that perhaps the people most in “need” of the benefits of FT coffee are those in Central and South America as this is where most of the FT coffee comes from.

While Jasmine is interested in the development of new FT products, she is uncertain about whether she will always sell FT products as she suggests that perhaps as time progresses something “better” will come along.

Ricki believes that one of the main limitations of FT is oversupply of coffee and the fact that many farmers are interested in being part of FT but demand is not large enough: “a couple of years ago there was a *huge* oversupply so, the whole [FT] organization was very reticent to go and certify any new countries, or any new co-ops, or any new farms.” As Raynolds (2002:11) indicates, there is an “excess capacity among registered groups [which] raises serious questions about whether new producer groups are going to be able to enter Fair Trade markets and share in the benefits.”

Jeremy highlights the fact that the market for FT coffee in Europe has “never really gotten to be 50% or anything like that. It’s been ten, maybe,” and that the same will likely be true in Canada (i.e. the market for FT coffee “probably isn’t gonna grow anymore . . . than 5%”). He explains that this is a limitation because “it’ll only be a niche market *probably*, . . . who knows, anything could happen, but, so that means that you have to be strategic in the way that you grow your business.” He points out that FT is “*tiny*, . . . miniscule, it’s not a revolution. . . . it’s a niche.” He states that on its own, it is not possible for FT to produce “a change in consciousness” as it “needs to be done in concert with all sorts of other things.” Despite his stance that FT coffee will remain a niche market, he also states that FT is also “big”:

it’s big enough that you can say, “Well, it’s all over the world now and it’s worth a billion dollars in sales and there’s however many, five million people that participate in it,” or whatever. So, it’s big, it’s not marginal. I mean, it is marginal but it’s big enough that you can point to it and say, “That’s what we’re for.”

Jake and Martyn maintain that while FT is a tiny movement, it is powerful because “when you *compare it* [FT] and a lot of these things [such as organics, shade-grown] to the [corporate] industry, right and I’m talking about the big three. Kraft, Nestle, Proctor & Gamble this whole movement is just *tiny*. But it poses a serious threat to the point where they’re actively

going out and trying to buy Fair Trade coffees and Fair Trade or organic coffees” (Jake). Martyn states that “we are seeing considerable improvements but it’s still insignificant, we have a 50% increase in certified Fair Trade sales every year, but in terms of *real* amount it’s a piddly little amount . . . but when you say *it’s 50%, whoa*, sounds like a big business to get into” (Martyn).

Martyn notes his frustration with a particular business who only sells FT as an option:

She has four or five different Fair Trade coffees but if you go in on any day you’ll see she’s got these cheap . . . regular coffees selling for eight dollars a pound and she’s advertising it. Not the Fair Trade coffee. . . . if she really was into Fair Trade -- I would have -- I would be *all* Fair Trade and I asked her that and she said, “Well, my customers want this particular coffee.” I guess from a business point of view she’s trying to make a living and pay her bills I suppose that’s an excuse.

I suggest that her reasoning is likely not “an excuse” but rather because her business would fail otherwise. This highlights the contradictions of attempting to expand FT in a competitive market society, in which many consumers are unaware and many businesses cannot afford to sell it. This could be for a variety of reasons, such as the customer not be willing to pay for it, or, even if it is the same price, there is a burden on the seller who must pay licensing fees, sign up with TransFair, or perhaps is not particularly interested in FT.

### **Cost-Sensitive Consumers & the Inequities of Class**

Class, gender, and geographic location are undoubtedly implicated in the outcome of the FT movement.<sup>25</sup> According to Hudson and Hudson (2004:136), “the most likely consumer” of FT coffee is “the reasonably affluent, female, 26-to-45 year old urbanite.” Here, I focus on the class dimension. An extremely important point made by some interviewees is that many people do not have the available income to purchase FT products, which highlights their perspective on the class dimension of FT. Many people are unable to afford FT coffee and, instead, can only

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<sup>25</sup> Contemporary feminist thought emphasizes the intersectionality of various inequities (i.e. it is difficult to discuss one form of inequity, e.g. gender, without also discussing inequities associated with racism, class, disability, poverty and sexuality, for example). See Mandell (2001) and Bryson (1999).

afford cheap Nestlé coffee, for instance; not everyone has the option to use their “dollar” as a “vote” for an ethical product, even if they might like to, and instead are forced due to limited funds to “vote” for unethical products (either consciously or unconsciously).

As Martyn states, not everyone can “afford to go buy organic, Fair Trade products. They don’t have the budget.” One of Martyn’s activist efforts exemplifies the problem with FT as a high-budget item and also reveals his perception of the community as good people. He explained that when he did demos of FT chocolate in a large chain store so people could taste it and while they “all agreed it was fantastic chocolate” he found that “a lot of the uneducated people” questioned why they should buy the FT chocolate if they could buy “buy twice as much” Hershey’s non-FT chocolate. Martyn states that such people are unaware of the “exploitation” involved in non-FT production and “they don’t want to know -- quite happy, they are interested in buying the cheapest thing.” However, he explains that some people do not “have the budget” and “can’t afford to go buy organic, Fair Trade” items. Perhaps people do not want to know about the conditions of production and exchange because they know that they cannot afford to purchase the product and knowing about the details will contribute to a sense of helplessness.

Five interviewees (Jake, Donna/Jim, Haley, Ricki) point out that the FT coffee that they sell is offered at a competitive price and, either the same, close to, or less than FT coffee in some other places. Jake states that FT coffee does not necessarily mean a higher price because the coffee/pound that he sells is eight to ten dollars *less* than “the *same* types [in terms of quality] of coffees in a Second Cup or Starbuck’s.” (This price comparison is based on green (unroasted) coffee that he sells and roasted coffee at the other shops, yet he states that it only costs “ten to 30, in some cases 50 cents” to roast and package a pound). As well, Jake’s price points are based in comparison to coffee that is “perceived in the market as a premium product” and as such, they do

not “compare [them]selves to Maxwell House”, an inferior product. Jim explains that that their coffee prices are “*less* than Starbucks.” Jim noted that their coffee is “not more expensive than the specialty chains . . . I mean we’re right in that range, some more, some less, they usually have a range of prices we just keep one. I’m not sure we’re charging enough, frankly, but, we’ll see.” As well Ricki states that the FT coffee that he sells is *cheaper* than non-FT coffee at another coffee shop: “my price points here are less than conventional coffees at most of the coffee shops. So, if you go into a Starbucks and you buy a Sumatra coffee . . . non-fair trade, non-organic is more expensive than my certified Fair Trade, certified organic.” Haley also notes that her prices (\$1.25/cup) are the same as Tim Horton’s.

Haley emphasizes the fact that FT coffee is more expensive and, as such, she is wholeheartedly committed to promoting and expanding FT coffee and making it available at a lower price. Her future goal is to be able to have a large enough company so that she can import coffee directly and then sell it at a price that is competitive with non-FT coffees. Currently, she sells coffee by the cup and personally absorbs the added costs of doing so and hopes to “someday make a profit.” She “can afford” to do so because her “rent” for her coffee establishment “is low” and she believes that her low prices will enable “cost-sensitive people to come and try it and probably, and hopefully shift from regular coffee to Fair Trade.” She notes that many cost-sensitive consumers will be forced to choose the cheaper coffee in the grocery store. She points out that education about FT will encourage people who can afford to do so to purchase FT. Haley also suggests that while it is “inevitable” that “multinational” coffee companies will always be able to get coffee at a cheaper price, consumers “will probably force the multinational to go that route” if they “start buying more Fair Trade.” Yet, Haley points out that she is not certain that this will occur: “I don’t know, I’m just thinking.”



Simon's experience as a consumer is also that the higher cost of FT products does not seem to a particularly problematic concern for consumers (his perspective is akin to sellers who argue that FT is not more costly) and explains that sometimes FT coffee/cup is the same price or cheaper than non-FT coffee. Ricki and Jasmine are each involved in a business that sells both FT and non-FT brewed coffee. However, they decided not to create a price differential/cup between the two types. The consumer can easily choose the FT coffee without having to worry about a higher cost. As Ricki explains: "[t]hat's the . . . business decision that I make -- make it available." Jasmine says it would be "nonsense" to charge more for the FT and effectively "penalize people for buying the right thing."

Often when FT coffee is sold by the pound it is more expensive than various brands of non-FT coffee, mainly that offered by large multinationals. Simon suggests that large multinationals who sell coffee very cheaply should be invited to participate in FT and he states that "*they will*" take part in FT "[i]f the demand *is created in the marketplace*." He notes that likely it is these corporations who can afford to absorb the costs of participating in FT instead of passing the cost onto the consumer. Simon suggests that cost/price is not a very large issue: "When you have outlets that are selling *cheaper* cups of coffee that are fairly traded or the same price of coffee that are fairly traded as their other . . . A person who had limited means and chose to drink coffee at all would have the potential at least for that to occur. They could go to an outlet where the price was not that much more—in fact it was the same 'cause I've seen those lots." Small-business owner Donna states: "it's *our* costs that are higher, it's not *your* [consumer] cost that's higher." Simon maintains that in other locations (provinces and countries) FT organic coffee "is the same price basically" and "at a market price, not at anything that I had to even worry about." He states: "I've been on fixed income more than once since I've bought

Fair Traded products and it was a concern, not overly, but it was a concern and I went, 'Wow. That's cool 'cause that isn't happening in lots of places in Canada.'" He states that one can also purchase a three dollar pound but that he "wouldn't drink a cup of Folger's or Maxwell House."

Simon feels compelled to participate in the purchase of FT coffee as he states:

the price is a complex topic and an issue that for me I'm comfortable what may appear to be more [expensive] to be peaceful that I'm not being exploitative in something [coffee] that I use a great deal of over my life span it's a contribution I can make in a way that, hey, I use a lot of this [coffee], why not do it fairly?

Jeremy's perspective on the higher cost of FT coffee and the inability of poor consumers to afford it was distinct. He states that the problem is "not that Fair Trade is too expensive", as it has to be in order to ensure a livelihood for producers, rather, the problem is an inability for "marginalized" (i.e. welfare or UI recipients or the working poor) to "afford Fair Trade" because they are "not getting paid enough." He states that his worker co-op "recognizes that contradiction" and as such "pay our workers well here the same way we pay our suppliers well. We wanna pay everybody fairly and that way the people who work at [name of co-op] can afford to buy Fair Trade and understand why it's important too."

Jasmine explains that a key limitation of FT as a consumer movement is that when people are suffering financially, they are less inclined or able to support social justice initiatives, such as FT:

nothing stays the same except that people need money to live. And *nobody* seems to think they have enough of it (laugh). . . . I don't know how much social conscience there really is, but when the economy turns down we'll see what social conscience we have left for Fair Trade (laugh) . . . when people have money they spend it more freely and . . . when the belt gets tightened how do people behave then, right?

The price of FT and organic products is similar. As Martyn states: "Fair Trade *by itself* . . . has a difficult time I think competing against the non-Fair Trade products. But, when . . . it's

Fair Trade and organic it becomes a lot more competitive because people compare it to organic coffee prices which are not that far off from a certified Fair Trade coffee which often is organic.”

However, the cost of organic products may be prohibitive for many people which suggests that FT and organic products may only be available to people in a relatively high income bracket.

Ricki explains that it is too expensive for him to use FT bananas for his smoothies because the consumer will not pay for the added cost. He and Jasmine argue that consumers (Jasmine broadly referring to Canadians and Ricki focusing specifically on the city) are not used to spending money for food products and as such the higher cost of FT products creates a problem. Jasmine’s quote exemplifies the point: “we’re used to paying like next to nothing for our food – we’ve gotta kinda get used to paying a bit more and we’ll just eat better and it will be better for all of us.” Ricki’s perception is that many consumers are status-driven and devote money to status symbols such as cars or a particular type of cell phone. He notes that everyday items, such as coffee and milk are typically very cheap. As such, it is difficult to charge more for coffee because many consumers are not driven by status when they purchase it. However, while Ricki highlighted the fact that many consumers do not choose to make a status statement with specialty coffee, some do, and he argues that they purchase Starbucks coffee due to “its association with wealth.”

Related to Ricki’s point about status is the fact that wealthy people *do have* the available income but do not buy FT coffee, as Martyn argues: “you can’t get people who are in low income sector to go buy a twelve dollar pound of coffee but there are other people who will buy fifteen dollar pound of coffee from Starbucks. . . . change that to Fair Trade. It makes a big

difference.” This is an important point because I believe that there are many people (who know about FT) who can afford FT products but choose not to purchase them.<sup>26</sup>

Interviewees’ perspectives vary with respect to the cost of FT products, with some emphasizing that they are more expensive while some argue that price is not a particularly relevant issue.

### **Necessary Money**

In this section I will briefly highlight some of the challenges faced by independent businesses that sell 100% FT products who often do not have access to large amounts of financial capital in contrast to corporate businesses that do (e.g. McDonald’s, Starbucks, etcetera).

Jeremy’s worker co-op, as does any business, requires financial capital to be able to succeed and expand. He notes that they need people to invest in their business, specifically people who do not necessarily have profit as their main motive, but rather an interest in assisting in the expansion of business with a social justice focus because the “return” for investors is quite limited. As Jeremy notes, while his business is “growing *incredibly fast*”, they need “capital and investors” and it is a challenge to find people who are willing to invest money in a 100% FT worker co-op who are “willing to take a little bit less money on in return because their money is being used for something that is transformative and useful.” FT licensees in the North must pay fees to take part in FT and must have access to funds to do so. Jasmine pointed out that consumers are unaware that as a seller of FT coffee she must “pay a premium for” it and do “a lot of reporting” to TransFair. However, she also noted that it is not necessary that consumers

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<sup>26</sup> I am sure there are *numerous* reasons, e.g. a belief that the coffee will be of inferior quality, a preference for a different brand/company/taste, an adamant opposition to supporting FT, unavailability, lack of knowledge of its existence, etcetera.

know all about this aspect because it is just part of the business aspect of being involved with it: “for them it’s just an easy purchase – ‘I’m helping, I’m helping, I can sleep.’”

Martyn’s FT activism involves organizing events in his community and in order to do so he needs access to money: “Nothing is free these days. Even the churches here in [city] charge money for rental space.” The FT volunteer group he is involved with secured some funding from various sources but it was insufficient to cover the costs of putting together various events to promote FT. Even with the combination of money contributed by two organizations, and fundraising throughout the process, Martyn contributed his personal money: “in the initial stages I was funding it.” While enough money was raised as the activities progressed so that he was eventually reimbursed it is important to recognize that if not for his ability to financially assist with these events, they may not have happened.

As part of the organizing, Martyn encouraged local independent businesses that sell FT products to sell an item for fundraising purposes. However, he was disappointed with the lack of effort on the part of businesses to promote and sell the item and states that if they “really are supportive of Fair Trade they should make an effort.” While interested in the expansion of FT in independent stores, Martyn realized that not “even the small stores *really* take the time to pitch Fair Trade.” He explains that while the store may sell FT coffee, customers may only purchase it because it is the “coffee of the day or they like the taste, not necessarily because it’s Fair Trade.” Martyn states that “often owners are keen about Fair Trade, but they hire a lot of people who are not necessarily Fair Trade . . . savvy.”<sup>27</sup> He explained that many of the places he “thought would do a really good job of selling” the item, ended up not doing so: “they made no effort. Left them on the counter and they didn’t try to engage the people [customers].” The reasons the FT

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<sup>27</sup> Jeremy’s strategy of educating both wholesale customers (e.g. café) *and* the staff of that café about FT is a positive step toward educating the employees about FT. However, it may be that the wholesale customer is merely interested in selling FT for the market aspect as opposed to caring deeply about the FT movement.

saleable item was not sold or promoted likely vary but in my analysis, I believe that one of the main reasons had to do with the way the item was set up. It created competition between various businesses which lessened the benefits to be obtained through the promotion of FT as a movement.

Having available funds and the time to devote to organizing educational and promotional events related to FT are inter-dependent on one's social location. For instance, one's class position affects how much time one has to devote to social justice related activism in relation the amount of time spent working to make money in order to survive in a capitalist economy:

in the end it's [FT events] turned out well. But I'm sure we could make it bigger but it means more work. We spent two months full-time between [name] and myself putting it all together. Just getting the [fundraising/saleable item] out, putting it all together was *tons* of work. . . . It's constantly being on the phone for two months. I can't do that.

I: No.

R: Unless I'm free. So, that's what [name] was doing.

Martyn's experience exemplifies the challenges involved in the amount of time and effort required to be an activist.

FLO, and its Canadian chapter, TransFair Canada, are non-profit organizations which require money and resources in order to continue their work. Jeremy states that TransFair needs "support" and that it "has to be able to grow with the [FT] market because it is essential in terms of auditing us and . . . giving us the license and making sure that we are Fair Trade. . . . they have to be able to keep up with that growth too." Martyn referred to the costs involved in operating the FT certification system because of the auditing process: "that cost is borne by the producers and by you and me as consumers because we pay a small licensing fee per pound of coffee."<sup>28</sup> Of great benefit to FT organizations is the potential long-term goal of Jake who notes that "[w]e

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<sup>28</sup> According to TransFair Canada (2004d), only companies, not consumers, pay licensing fees.

would love to be, in addition to our licensing fees, helping fund certain projects that they're [FLO] working on."

### **Limited Availability of Fair Trade Products**

The current productive capacity of FT coffee combined with the limited availability of FT products in the North, as well as a desire on the part of consumers to have access to such products, provides an opportunity for FT to expand beyond its present niche. Of course, the expansion of FT is not a simple matter and depends on many factors. It is imperative that consumers interested in FT have access to FT products in order to enable them to act on their values. Many interviewees referred to the fact that FT products are limited in availability, with many sellers noting their role as increasing that availability. As Martyn states, "there isn't a lot of Fair Trade products unfortunately on the market." Haley believes that the lack of availability of FT products in Canada is the "biggest limitation" for consumers and states that "other products [besides coffee] are not really available just yet". She is involved in the sale of FT coffee for exactly this reason as she aims to contribute to making FT coffee more available. She plans to offer FT sugar for customers to put in their coffee and also sell FT tea and a drink with FT chocolate, all of which she has been only able to locate on the Internet.<sup>29</sup> While noting that the availability of FT products is getting better, Haley is "hoping someday" that consumers have the "option" to purchase FT products from grocery stores and states that it "doesn't matter how expensive it is . . . I'll try to contribute that way too as a consumer." Haley states that FT coffee is "more available now" in reference to her ability to access FT coffee from a wholesaler. Ricki does not participate in FT as a consumer but contributes to making it available: "as a consumer, it's not widely available. As a seller, [challenges] no,

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<sup>29</sup> In the first interview Haley explained that one challenge was that she had not been able to find individual FT sugar packets for customers to put in their coffee. By the second interview she had found them.

not really, because again I'm the manufacturer of it. Now, if I *wasn't*, right . . . would I be able to get a lot of it? No. 'Cause most of the manufacturers don't carry it. They're not interested in that, they want mass produced high volume, high profits coffee."

Jeremy acknowledges that "part of the struggle for a lot of people with Fair Trade is availability" and offers an example of how consumer-initiative contributed to making it available. A church group wanted access to FT coffee at some particular stores so they approached Jeremy's business and requested that his company supply these stores with the FT coffee that his business wholesales. The church group told Jeremy that if he agreed to do so, they would help the process of encouraging the stores to agree to sell FT coffee by telling the owners: 'We'll buy this coffee if you sell it.' Jeremy explained that otherwise the stores "would never in a million years have bought" their coffee. This is an example of consumer-initiative, which led to the availability of FT coffee in a new location. As Jeremy points out, without consumer demand, the store would not have been interested in selling it (i.e. buying wholesale from Jeremy).

Ricki believes that there is less awareness and availability of FT in Canada than the United States. He attended a coffee trade show in Canada and stated: "I don't think TransFair had a booth in the show. In the United States . . . Fair Trade had about twenty or thirty . . . booths and they had representatives and farmers from *every single country* that was certified Fair Trade."

As part of a strategy to raise consumer-awareness of where to find FT products, actions such as Martyn's are excellent in that the group he is involved with, who are interested in "grass-roots promotion", has prepared a list of "fifteen to twenty companies in [location] that sell Fair



Trade products” which they provide to people for free because many people “don’t know” where to find them.

FT bananas are not available in all parts of Canada. Martyn is involved with a FT volunteer group who attempted to initiate the sale of FT bananas in one city. They were unsuccessful for various reasons (i.e. an inability to secure a guaranteed market for the bananas, a lack of awareness or interest on the part of retailers, and the short shelf-life of fresh fruit, as compared to the long shelf-life of green coffee beans). Martyn states: “in hindsight [we were] a very small group of people trying to influence in some way large players. A lot of the banana market is controlled in the US by the big corporations so you’d have to bring the bananas somehow through special means.” Many people they contacted were uninterested or unaware of FT: “we wanted to gauge the interest for Fair Trade bananas in all the co-ops and got a list of all the co-operatives and we sent them all a letter most of them didn’t even care, . . . a lot . . . were not knowledgeable of Fair Trade. There are a few in [city] who would probably be interested.” The attempt was “abandoned” for the reasons noted. Yet, there are FT organic bananas presently available in another province in Canada and another location may be also looking into selling FT bananas within the country, according to Martyn. As well, FT rice is available for sale in Quebec in small packages, but Martyn is interested in being able to purchase large packages. In talking with them he found out that “there’s some issue about keeping the organic as well” interfering with the ability to sell larger bags. While the availability of rice and bananas are presently limited in availability, perhaps they will expand across Canada.

## **Where and How to Expand the Fair Trade Market & Movement: Who are the Allies? What is the Motive?**

The issue of where and how to expand the FT market, in terms large chain stores and independent businesses, and how to determine what types of companies are allies of the FT movement, as it relates to motives, was an issue highlighted by some interviewees. Some want FT products to be readily available in chain stores, while others would prefer that local independent businesses sell FT products.

Grimes (2005:245) suggests that because a great deal of FT producers are in need of finding a market, there is a “push among supporters of fair trade and fair traders themselves to influence conventional companies, such as Starbucks, to commit to buying fairly traded goods.” According to Starbucks (2006a), they are “North America’s largest purchaser” of FT coffee. Yet, they only sell one varietal of FT coffee and it is only available for purchase on particular dates (Starbucks 2006c). In 2005, Starbucks’ FT coffee purchases accounted for “approximately 10 percent of global” FT coffee imports (Starbucks 2006a). Martyn explains that when he went into a Starbucks store he noticed that they were advertising FT coffee. However, he did not see any packages of FT beans for sale and when he asked about a brewed cup, they said that they were not “serving it.” He explains that Starbucks “buy more” FT coffee than other businesses and “they are in that respect good for the producers.” However, while he does not “brag about” chain stores, like Starbucks, and similar businesses “as vanguards of Fair Trade coffee” he is “quite happy to see them sell more -- I mean without giving them too much PR [public relations].”

Martyn was involved in activism in regards to encouraging a large coffee chain to provide FT coffee. He noted the contradictory aspect of a company that supports an international development organization but does not sell FT coffee:

We have a campaign right now for [name of coffee franchise] to sell Fair Trade coffee or at least provide a[n] option for Fair Trade coffee. They are a supporter of [international development organization]. Each store [supports the organization] . . . which is what? Thirty bucks a month. But I find it ironical that . . . most of the coffee they buy is exploited coffee. And the hundreds of farmers in the same community probably where they . . . [support the org.] . . . are being screwed.

However, in the process of this activism some confusion arose between Martyn and a local, independent FT coffee roaster. Martyn's activism on this initiative may appear contradictory with his beliefs, yet, it is not. He was involved in pressuring a coffee retail chain to offer consumers the choice of FT coffee by encouraging them to follow in the path of Starbucks. According to Martyn, an independent coffee shop involved in the sale of exclusively FT coffee was not impressed with this initiative as it "gave the impression" that Starbucks is "the main supporter" of FT. Martyn is not particularly pleased with the limited "choice" of FT coffee offered by Starbucks amongst the majority of non-FT coffee that they offer. Yet, because he believes that FT coffee sales, no matter who the seller, is ultimately beneficial for coffee producers who are always in search of markets for their FT coffee, he became involved in pressuring a large coffee franchise to sell FT coffee. It was not Martyn's intent to detract attention from the local independent businesses involved in FT as it is precisely these local businesses that he is *most* interested in promoting and supporting. In fact, according to Martyn, the local business who voiced their dissent is "the very first coffee shop in [city] that started the Fair Trade coffee shop" and as such they are "the vanguards of Fair Trade coffee." Martyn noted his ambivalence about a desire to "see *aisles* of" FT products in "supermarkets" because of the benefit of "huge exposure when you have a big, huge clientele that you have the products and

they're likely to be bought." He questions whether this is "really Fair Trade." However, he states:

I think as more and more people want it and more and more of this gets stocked I think they might be more prone to promoting these products hopefully for the appropriate reasons. I don't think people like Starbucks and [name of large supermarket chain] . . . are doing it because they believe in Fair Trade. Because then the question follows, what about the rest of the coffee they have? And what about the rest of their products? I mean, unfair trade. And I don't think they wanna highlight that. They wanna sort of keep it low key. They're quite happy to sell it but they don't wanna brag about it, cause then people will laugh. (Martyn)

what is your motive? Are you just trying to stay in business because it's a way of living for you and you've been living this for a while and you've suddenly discovered Fair Trade and you want to try it out because you look good? Or are you really interested in trying to develop this market for yourself? . . . are you going to be two percent this year and five percent next year and ten next year and eventually become fully Fair Trade? I have trouble with organizations who have . . . a small quantity . . . certified Fair Trade. Why is that? Is it because you can't get the product? Or is it because you've got a clientele that still wants that old stock and they can't convert them all because they can't get the same thing certified Fair Trade. . . . I mean there are coffee shops that can be all Fair Trade but I think . . . you need to be in the right location . . . where you've got a lot of awareness about Fair Trade you could probably be a successful business . . . (Martyn)

Referring to the priority of raising consumer awareness of FT through educational efforts, Martyn states that "[w]e are still a long way away from worrying about big corporations like [large supermarket chain] selling a *large* amount of Fair Trade products. . . . maybe five years down the road. In the meantime . . . there's lots of opportunities for good Fair Trade."

Simon explains that:

politics is the art of the possible. And clearly in social justice, you look for incremental gains and then build on those. So, first of all, turn on the spouts at Tim's [i.e. Tim Horton's] with some Fair Trade coffee. They're such a *big* supplier that if Tim's went, McDonald's<sup>30</sup> might go. I mean, imagine that. *Why not?* But you wouldn't have them *only* offering Fair Trade or you likely wouldn't get anywhere, right? And these things would be possible again, through concerted efforts.

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<sup>30</sup> This interview occurred prior to McDonald's decision to sell FT.

Just as Simon would be happy if large chains such as Tim Horton's and McDonalds' began to sell FT, Haley is inclined to push for her brand of FT coffee to be available in large supermarket chains. In other words, anybody who sells FT products and is interested in becoming involved is a potential ally. Haley needs to be able to buy large quantities of FT coffee directly (as opposed to through an importer) so that she can "afford to put it at [a] lower price and compete" with non-FT coffee: "that's the problem, people is not buying it 'cause it's too expensive. So if I'm able to offer it at a competitive price maybe people will start getting to buy it." Haley believes that it is a good idea to "encourage" supermarkets "to have an aisle for Fair Trade" products because she maintains that this would raise awareness of FT products because this is where "everybody" shops. She explains that "the market for that [FT] is so *small now* that they don't really see any need to do that." However, while Haley noted the role of FT products in educating consumers, she then referred to the importance of education *first*: "we have to educate more consumers about it" so that storeowners will be interested in providing FT products.

Martyn refers to the "controversy about . . . big corporations embracing Fair Trade and the local communities who have been doing it for years" and refers to the fact that large corporate chain stores are able to sell FT products at lower prices than local, independent businesses engaged in FT and "it's putting pressure on the real -- the Fair Traders to match the price or they're gonna lose business."<sup>31</sup> He suggests that perhaps local businesses, not presently involved in the sale of FT products could begin to do so, as a way to help prevent independents, in general, from being put of business by corporate chains, but he acknowledges that such businesses *already* "have a tough time selling . . . their normal [non-FT] products I don't know . . . how willing they are to try it [selling FT products]." Both Jasmine and Martyn are happy when

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<sup>31</sup> Martyn sometimes purchases FT sugar from a particular large supermarket chain because it's convenient. But he "usually" gets it from a Mennonite store that sells FT products, or from Ten Thousand Villages.

coffee growers achieve benefits through the sale of FT coffee in large retail chains. However, both would prefer if local, independent businesses secured the market for the products. Jasmine states that “*it will be interesting to see if the big stores really jump on for Fair Trade. I don’t know. I kinda hope not.*” Their perspectives differ in that Martyn’s (and Jeremy’s) preference has to do with the focus of local independent businesses who are interested in treating their employees in accordance with FT principles. Marytn is not in favor of referring to large retail chains as “ethical organizations”, even if they sell FT coffee, and is uninterested in promoting such businesses as he believes they only sell FT coffee to present a positive corporate image which does not fall in line with their actual business practice as a whole:

Fair Trade is meant to be fair for the entire production chain, not just for the producers. In fact that’s why there’s a lot of questions about whether [large supermarket chain] is an ethical organization just because they sell Fair Trade coffee. . . .it [FT] is meant to be fair for the whole process from producer to retailer so I don’t think [large supermarket chain] pays their employees a fair price they don’t give them benefits. So, I don’t think they’re treating their -- most of their employees under Fair Trade terms. But you take a co-operative like [name] who are all Fair Trade. I think they treat their employees a lot better, they pay them better. So, Fair Trade products tend to be more expensive because of that. Everybody in the chain is getting a fair deal.<sup>32</sup>

Jasmine’s interest in independents securing the market for FT is simply because she is, in general, a independent business owner and interested in the success of such businesses, in contrast to large chains. She believes that “Fair Trade and organic coffee, *they just don’t produce what* would need to be available in the market like all the big players to be on board. So, it’s a method too for independents to work together and work co-operatively together in the same kind of way that the small farmers have to work together.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The FT certification process does not require that Northern businesses involved in FT pay their employees a fair wage. Yet, some FT activists and companies are indeed interested in this, as discussed.

<sup>33</sup> However, as noted in **Ch. Two**, the production of FT coffee is greater than demand and many FT producers are forced to sell on the conventional market which means there is an opportunity for the FT market to expand. This depends on many factors such as education, consumer demand, and desire to support FT, to name a few.

Jeremy is interested in dealing with independent and local businesses as opposed to large multinational chains when wholesaling and marketing their FT coffee as this provides the benefit of establishing relationships with small business owners which can then pass along the message of FT to their customers (or Jeremy's business talks directly to staff). Jeremy says if their worker co-op was approached by a large retail chain to supply FT coffee it would be a "hard" decision for a variety of reasons: "Our ability to supply them, our ability to monitor quality and also just what their motivation is." I asked Jeremy, as a wholesaler of 100% FT coffee whether he sells to companies that offer FT as a choice and he states that "a fair number of customers . . . have cafés where Fair Trade will be, . . . they'll have like a couple of Fair Trade coffees and then regular coffees too." I inquired further to find out how he felt about that. He commented as follows, stating that "about half" of the businesses sell 100% FT coffee which, from my perspective seems like a very large percentage:

it'd be nice if they switched over [to all FT coffee] but some of them are afraid . . . of going a hundred percent Fair Trade just because of the price or . . . they might want . . . some other kind of roast or they have another roaster that they deal with who . . . have a coffee that people really like and so we can't make it kinda thing. So there's all kinds of factors that go into that.

He also states: "Generally speaking in the places we [sell to we] see an increase and – people like our coffee so that's good."

This section has discussed the issues of where and how to expand the market and how to determine who are the friends and foes of the movement. Some interviewees refer to the importance of local, independent businesses securing the market, while others refer to the benefit of large retail chains selling FT products. My analysis reveals the complexities of this issue (e.g. in terms of some preferring independents selling FT coffee, while noting the benefit of all sales helping Southern producers, no matter what type of outlet that sells the product). Interestingly,

while Haley referred to the benefit of selling FT at a competitive price (as compared to non-FT coffee) in grocery chains, Martyn noted the downfall of such chains selling FT products at lower costs as it jeopardizes the success of local, independent businesses.

### **Fair Trade Labeling & Certification**

This section focuses on the lack of governance of the “Fair Trade” phrase<sup>34</sup> and use/misuse of the FT logo. One of the challenges faced by those involved in FT is that use of the phrase is not legislated which effectively means that anybody can use it. Jeremy explains: “whether we can get legislation passed in Canada that says to use the phrase Fair Trade without it being certified by TransFair Canada’s against the law, it could work.”<sup>35</sup> I asked Jeremy whether his “role [would] involve potentially contacting TransFair and bringing up the issue of them perhaps monitoring the [FT] phrase” and he replied, “Oh, we do it all the time (laugh).” The TransFair Canada FT logo on products, as well as the FT certification process provides consumers and sellers with the assurance that the product has met international trade standards. Yet, there are some problems with these two processes, as highlighted by some interviewees. As Jeremy and Jim point out, some businesses advertise that they sell FT products when in fact they do not sell *certified* Fair Trade products. Jeremy explains that “you can get people involved in it that aren’t Fair Trade that call themselves Fair Trade and then of course, that makes everybody cynical.” Nicholls and Opal (2005:230) have noted that there is “no protection against ‘counterfeit’ Fair Trade products.”

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<sup>34</sup> The issue of governance of the ‘fair trade’ phrase is unrelated to issues of capitalization or lower-case letters as such slight modification does not seem to be sufficient to distinguish certified FT from non-certified. In this section I use the full phrase with capitalization, yet this is an arbitrary decision on my part as the main focus is on the difficulties encountered by those involved in the sale of FT certified products while other businesses use the ‘Fair Trade’ phrase for non-certified products. Jim and Donna, however, explicitly capitalize “F” and “T” or use the phrase “Fair Trade certified” as a strategy in order to distinguish between certified and non-certified FT products.

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy also noted that while he indicates that his coffee is certified organic, he does not feel it necessary to include the organic logo. He relates this to the fact that “there are laws that govern the use of” the phrase ‘certified organic.’ In contrast, this is not the case for use of the phrase “fair trade”, as anyone can use it.



Certainly, issues related to use of the phrase “fair trade” by those selling products that are not certified creates a problem for people who are attempting to make ethical purchases and are confronted with a variety of labels and messages. Martyn is frustrated “with these people who go around, who say they’re Fair Trade but not part of any organization, you don’t know how much they’re gouging you.” Jim voices his concern that TransFair “didn’t even set it up right in the first place so that they could protect the Fair Trade certified term right. People can say it’s Fair Trade certified, they don’t have to be members of TransFair and they won’t stop them.” The implication of this “big concern”, from Jim’s perspective, is that perhaps people will begin to lose trust in the credibility of the FT system:

people become cynical customers go, “Well, you know, is it, is it, I don’t know, whatever.” And it just cheapens the whole thing so as a marketing tool I think it’s . . . potentially going to be a problem because unless they can get control of it then people are going to be using that term all over the place. (Jim)

Jake claims that the Fair Trade phrase “is pretty universal so it was an excellent choice of name for the organization” and emphasized the importance of the FT certification organization *not* claiming “ownership over the concept” and believes that “nobody can.”

Donna and Jim maintain the importance of using distinct terminology and this is extremely important as it aids immensely in maintaining the integrity of the “Fair Trade” phrase for certified products.

Along with the challenges involved with misuse of the Fair Trade phrase, there are challenges related to the FT logo/label. Jeremy explains: “TransFair’s job is to increase the recognizability of the label and for people to understand what it actually means so we can actually have a differentiation between certified Fair Trade products and other ones that are just called fair trade and then you can ask questions about them. So, I think it’s key for the success of the movement.” While the FT logo itself is trademarked, companies that only sell FT coffee

as an option are keen to market this to consumers by advertising the FT logo. While some people are aware that a TransFair logo sticker in a coffee shop on the wall does not necessarily mean that all of the coffee for sale is FT, some consumers may not be aware. Jeremy explains his perspective:

the labeling system that we have needs to be tinkered with too because we -- like [name of Jeremy's business/worker co-op] is 100% Fair Trade and so as a result we can put the [Fair Trade] label all over the place, stick it on the walls and everything . . . Other coffee shops might be, or coffee roasters might be 5% Fair Trade and they can still use the label. I mean they can't use it on all their stuff but they can on the coffee that they use that's Fair Trade but what happens is if people ask them if they're Fair Trade, they can say, "Yeah, we're Fair Trade, we've got Fair Trade coffee."

The major implication of people using the FT logo when they do not sell exclusively FT coffee is that if those businesses stick the FT logo "on the door then everybody'll think that everybody's Fair Trade and so everything's fine (laugh) so the market won't grow because it'll be this false market" (Jeremy). It seems to me that this issue is most relevant for businesses that sell brewed coffee (in contrast, FT chocolate bars are labeled and clearly distinguishable) because the customer that orders a medium coffee may assume it is FT because of the logo on the door. However, in my experience, businesses that sell FT certified coffee as an option make a point of distinguishing it.

Jim and Donna's perspective was unique in feeling frustrated with the lack of action on the part of TransFair in regards to voiced concerns related to businesses using the FT logo who are not registered with the FT organization. Jim has contacted TransFair but he is "sure they never find" people "using the [Fair Trade] logo when they shouldn't be" because they are not "policing that process." (He notes that another certifier they deal with, "find out almost right away"). Jim is adamant in his position that "if you have a program and you have rules then you have to make sure that people are following them but you actually have to have some

surveillance to make sure that happens and I don't think they do it, frankly." Jim suggests that when someone buys coffee they have to check the TransFair website to see if the company is actually legitimately selling FT coffee. Jim refers to a particular business:

if you look at their website you'll see beans that are Fair Trade certified. If you look up on the list of licensees they're not one. And I've got emails from TransFair [Canada] saying, "Oh, you know, nothing we can do about it." . . . You don't have to look *very hard* to find a company that is a licensee, but not *really* selling any or much of the coffee.

Jake states: "I'm sure there's lots of companies that are using the label that aren't licensed to do it but that's part of the problem with certification."

### **Defining/Distinguishing between Fair Trade, fair trade, and fairly traded**

Some interviewees distinguish between FT certification and fair trade as a concept.

Donna and Jim distinguish between "Fair Trade"/"Fair Trade certified" and "fairly traded."

They deny that FT certified coffee is "the only fairly traded coffee." Jake highlights the difference between "fair trade" as a "general concept" and FT: "there's fair trade philosophy and there's Fair Trade certification, and Fair Trade certification came out of a philosophy originally about equality in trade." He further states that FT certification is:

*part of something bigger.* It's part of fair trade as it relates to just simply doing business in *all of its aspects* according to some sort of fair principle or principles and fair trade rolls up into a whole sustainability philosophy, so. You wanna focus on certification, you really have to separate certification from the whole concept of fair trade.

When I inquired further as to his understanding of fair trade as a general concept he explained:

"on every situation it's different. Every town, every country, every product, basically I think it just means respecting the person you're doing business with and sharing profits with them."

Jake provides the following about his belief in fair trade as a principle, as it relates to his business:

it's just doing business in a fair way. Not discriminating when you're hiring, not discriminating when you're establishing wages or salaries, it's paying your producer a fair

price, not squeezing the life out of somebody. It also relates to the environment as well, doesn't it? So, fair trade with the environment. . . . as long as you put something back in as much as you take out well then it's an equal exchange. (Jake)

For Jim and Donna, FT is one possible form of a "fairly traded" product and for Jake, FT is one component of the larger concept of "fair trade." They all emphasize that FT certification is one component of something broader. Donna explains that "trading fairly does not mean that TransFair Canada or any of those organizations has anything to do with it necessarily, but Fair Trade, I never use that phrase to do with coffee unless I mean TransFair certified." For Jake, "certified Fair Trade is one thing and it's one thing only and . . . they're not the definition [of fair trade]."

Jeremy explains that "there are some other products that are . . . sort of Fair Trade" but not certified. However, Jeremy is making reference to products *other than* coffee, while Donna and Jim refer to the fact that coffee (and chocolate) *can be fairly traded whether certified FT or not*. Defining such conceptual perspectives of "fair" in this specific way did not arise with the other interviewees

### **Fair Trade is *One Part of Sustainability or Fair Trade Includes Sustainability***

For the interviewees who believe that FT is one aspect of a broader concept of what "fair" means, FT is *also* simply one component of their belief in the importance of sustainability. Four interviewees (Jake, Martyn, Donna/Jim) explicitly detail a focus on the concept of "sustainability" as a way of detailing their interest in FT. While Martyn believes that FT includes/ensures sustainability, Jake, Donna and Jim believe that FT is one part of sustainability.

Jake believes that sustainability includes "the *best of specifics* to create a whole", (i.e. FT, organic, shade-grown and sustainable processing "as far as coffee growing, processing, and trading is concerned"). He further notes: "A certifier of Fair Trade has a very telescopic position

as far as what constitutes Fair Trade. . . . I'm about sustainability, Fair Trade's just a part of that." Jake's explains that their business approach cannot be placed "in a box": "We operate outside of the . . . purview<sup>36</sup> of all of the certifications because we're . . . about something that's in my opinion, bigger, larger, better, comprehensive." Jake emphasizes the importance of:

access to markets [for farmers] and having access to credit to buy the equipment to do the production or drying component on-site. So, Fair Trade can't help that – that sets a minimum base price, but \$1.26 is . . . *just* enough and I think typically the small farmer is going to re-invest whatever modest profits they can make from that \$1.26 back into their communities – wells, medical facilities but they need access to more money, to credit, like any business to grow.

However, according to TransFair Canada (N.d.:1), FT co-operatives use the five cent social premium provided by FT "for social and economic investments" and one example is "processing equipment." However, Jake did not refer to such information, and in his perception FT does not provide enough money for investing in sustainable processing equipment. He believes that loans must be set up (outside of the FT system). Along with non-profit organizations, his business assisted in the creation of "a micro-loan facility" so that "small farmers' co-operatives can access *credit* at reasonable interest rates" to enable them to purchase sustainable processing equipment (e.g. solar dryer), which "allows the small farmer to process [wash and dry] coffee on-site without there being any negative environmental impact" (Jake). Jake maintains that it is very important for farmers to be able to "process their coffee on-site" because otherwise they are forced to "find a mill to either dry it for them or they sell directly to the mill. And if they're hiring a mill to do the processing that's adding costs" which means that they have to get loans (at interest rates that are very high such that farmers are not able to pay them back and "lose their

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<sup>36</sup> Jake is careful to point out that, of course, his business does "conform" to the standards of the certification organizations that they are members of. His point, here, is about the fact that FT on its own does not ensure a sustainable coffee industry and his business has designed a way to deal with this problem, as explained.

farms”). Jim also refers to the importance of sustainable coffee milling and people having access to money to be able to do so.

Jake also highlighted his interest in thinking broadly about sustainability in other industries. He notes that coffee is a “*huge* market” and that their business approach to a sustainable coffee industry “could stand as an example that change can happen in other industries and other people in other industries can take bits and pieces, adopt it for their industry and move it towards sustainability as well.” He noted that the “technified” agricultural production on farms in Western Canada is a “ridiculous way of growing things” and also referred to the problems with the North American forest industry lacking a sustainable focus.

Jim and Donna’s interest in sustainability is tied in with their interest in environmental protection, as well as the importance of ensuring that people are paid fairly for their product and that the product is produced in a sustainable manner. As Jim states: “Sustainability means paying a price that covers all the costs and . . . covers the cost of the footprint of that product. . . . if it’s . . . produced in a sustainable manner it means that you can keep doing it, keep doing it and that costs more than doing it in an unsustainable manner where you’re polluting.” Donna also notes the importance of “sustainability locally as well as globally” in terms of the importance of people in the local community not “making a bigger environmental footprint than” necessary. While they did not explicitly state that FT does not equal sustainability, it seems quite clear that they are implying so, especially considering the fact that they are engaged in “fairly traded” exchanges besides FT.

Martyn is convinced that FT, itself, encompasses enough to ensure sustainability as one of the things it is about is “sustainable development.” (He also refers to the importance of organic certification in that FT “co-operatives are encouraged to become organic”). He states

that FT is “about . . . long-term development for these communities so they can sustain it for generations.” He states further: “small-scale farmers are the true . . . protectors of native biodiversity -- stewards . . . so they’d be the best people to help and promote if you can help them with the livelihood, giving them a fair price for the way they produce things . . . we wouldn’t be cutting down rainforests.” However, he also emphasizes that sustainability is also about planting other crops so “they’re not stuck selling one thing” and he believes “the Fair Trade movement tries to promote – a balanced environment in the way they [farmers] produce their product.” Martyn comments on his perspective as to the types of social justice issues that are connected to FT and the fact that it is more than just the guaranteed floor price that makes him interested in FT:

Fair Trade isn’t just about paying somebody a fair wage it’s about environmental issues too, it’s about sustainability. It’s helping community development, it’s about respecting the environment, it’s a process that tries to help producers become more organic, get away from chemicals and pesticides so that they can sustain this, a lot of the small-scale farmers are producing coffee--the best coffees in the world in a very bio-diverse environment and if you get rid of bio-diversity . . . it’s going to be the end of coffee. Coffee isn’t grown in huge plantations. There is . . .but . . . it’s the cheap Robusta coffee that’s flooding the market.

While Jeremy uses the term “unsustainable” to refer to non-FT coffee and also discusses the importance of “ecological sustainability”, Ricki seems to imply that organics, and shade-grown are important for “sustainability”, and Jasmine briefly discusses “sustainability” in reference to a coffee conference that she attended and refers to benefits of the Rainforest Alliance’s interest in “sustainable agriculture”, these interviewees do not discuss “sustainability” in depth in a similar way to the others.

## Fair Trade Labels and Competition from Other 'Ethical' Initiatives

In capitalist societies, companies vie for consumer support by offering [read: bombarding them with] various products. In capitalist rhetoric, this is referred to as providing "choice" for the consumer. FT products must compete for consumers' attention among a wide variety of available products. As the push for social responsibility in the marketplace becomes increasingly competitive (Nicholls and Opal 2005:140-141, 245-249; Hudson and Hudson 2003), there is an urgent need to educate about the specific benefits of the ethical aspects of FT certification and how it differs from other initiatives, which are often limited in their approach. "The problem becomes one of competing labels, with the legitimate fair-trade labels competing with labels from less authentic organizations that, nonetheless, claim to represent the same ideals" (Hudson and Hudson 2003:424). I maintain that it is counterproductive to promote initiatives that are "less ambitious", such as Rainforest Alliance certification (Hudson and Hudson 2003:426), *in place of* FT certified products.

For instance, Rainforest Alliance is a competitor of FT, especially in light of the fact that sales of FT bananas decreased when the Rainforest Alliance began to sell its bananas in Europe (Hudson and Hudson 2003:426). The Rainforest Alliance focuses on ensuring that bananas "are produced in a manner that will protect the rainforests in which they are harvested" (Hudson and Hudson 2003:425). However, in contrast to the "more stringent social code" provided by FT certification, "there appears to be very little in the way of social (as opposed to environmental) criteria other than a very vague commitment to ensure fair treatment and good conditions for workers" with the Rainforest Alliance certification (Hudson and Hudson 2003:426).

In contrast to FT, neither Utz Kapeh (a label developed by a European "supermarket chain" in 1997 "to signify 'certified responsible' coffee"), nor the Rainforest Alliance (a US non-



profit), provide a “minimum price requirement for products” (Nicholls and Opal 2005:140-141). As Nicholls and Opal (2005:141) point out, both of these competitive initiatives leave much to be desired as far as a fair exchange is concerned as “[n]either label [Utz Kapth nor the RA] guarantees the extra income to farmers and farm workers that the FLO ensures, nor is producer empowerment a stated goal of either certification model.”

Some interviewees discussed the benefits of and/or are involved in the sale and/or purchase of additional ‘ethical’ products along with FT. Some examples of competing labels are the Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP), Rainforest Alliance, and Utz Kapeh. For instance, two interviewees who sell FT coffee, are in the process of including FT tea in their product line, and also currently sell tea from the Ethical Tea Partnership. One interviewee is also interested in the work being done by Utz Kapeh. Three others are involved in the sale of Rainforest Alliance products.

Ricki explains below why he is interested in selling ETP tea as opposed to FT tea. However, one point of interest is that Ricki notes the impact of consumers on business decisions which is an indication of the power of consumer demand in determining various products offered by business:

one, quality. Two, availability, and three . . . I think there is a window to try a different organization . . . with a tea product [as opposed to coffee] . . . I could be wrong. The consumer could come to me and say, “Well, how come it’s not Fair Trade?” I’ll learn quickly. But, if there happens to be more . . . consistent quality and availability on the Fair Trade side, then I’d lean towards that. But, I do have an open mind to this [pointing to his brochure of ETP]. (Ricki)

In a later interview, Ricki noted that he had the ETP tea in stock and would “soon” be selling FT tea. I am unsure as to why he decided to include both in his product line but suspect it has to do with various issues noted above.

Ricki also highlights the potential problem with people who engage in “direct trade” that is not certified and claim to be engaging in fair trading. He believes that FT certification provides benefits (i.e. labour practices, loans, co-ops, other projects) which are likely impossible to achieve by an individual in the North. He believes that even if a small business decides to “adopt a farm” and “deal directly” that it is necessary to have “some kind of a structured organization ‘til things get off the ground.” However, Ricki seems ambivalent about his stance on FT and alternative ethical initiatives:

Is that [FT] the most optimal way? I don’t really know. I’m not sure. Maybe not, maybe yes. Maybe the most optimal way could be where you adopt a farm for instance and have nothing to do with Fair Trade. But, right now it [FT] is one of the bricks in the roadway . . . it has its benefits. But, it’s not necessarily all encompassing and there could potentially be more opportunities for doing better. (Ricki)

Ricki<sup>37</sup> clearly states that it is important to let the free market be open to new initiatives that may be better than FT: “if they [FT] end up having to monopolize this whole process and other organizations cannot get involved perhaps with a better system, better idea . . . then that becomes problematic.” In terms of monopolizing, Ricki was referring to the possibility of FT “becom[ing] so embedded in the culture of the consumer which is only buy Fair Trade coffee, and they monopolize it and other organizations try to bring out a coffee . . . -- consumer won’t buy it because they don’t know anything about it. . . . *even though* [different organization] might have an approach that is substantially better and far superior for . . . the farmer.”

Jasmine and Jake refer to benefits of a variety of organizations. However, Jake’s perspective is distinct in that he notes the importance of *all certifications combined* in one product as opposed to choosing one over the other (the combination of certifications on Jake’s

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<sup>37</sup> As noted above, FT co-ops typically sell only half of their beans through FT and must resort to selling the rest through the conventional market. Ricki’s perception that perhaps FT co-ops should be allowed the option of going “to auction as well” suggests that he is likely unaware that most producers involved in FT are not able to sell all of their coffee as FT (i.e. his level of understanding of FT is limited on this aspect).

coffee is an initiative by his company as opposed to the organizations collaborating) while Jasmine focused on highlighting the similar importance of another organization:

I think that Fair Trade's happening is . . . helping a *vast* majority of small farmers. There's no perfect organization or organizational model that can help *all* farmers. If there was that would be fantastic so, it's a question of a variety of different types of organizations. Fair Trade, organic, working together to improve the livelihoods of *all* farmers. (Jake)

you could argue that their organization [Rainforest Alliance] is more important or certainly has as equal an importance in agriculture as Fair Trade . . . they don't guarantee necessarily a floor price for the growers but they'll teach the farmers *how to* . . . use their *land* in a better way . . . all these organizations are important. (Jasmine)

Other interviewees voiced their concern over competition from other business that claim to be selling "fair" products. Martyn talks at length about the downfalls of competition from such organizations as Utz Kapeh and the RA, which challenge the success of the FT market:

you go to Second Cup it looks like they're selling Fair Trade coffee. It's environmentally friendly, it's bird friendly, it's shade-grown, but are the farmers getting a fair deal? You have this organization called Rainforest Alliance who are all about environmentalism and biodiversity and sustainability but there's nowhere in their brochures of their program that they talk about paying a good fair price for whatever it is that they are helping promote. Bananas or coffee. So, it's Rainforest Alliance certified but that means nothing for the farmer. That's the kind of . . . challenges we have . . . There's lots of organizations that are trying to promote themselves as Fair Trade. (Martyn)

there's another organization in Europe called Utz Kapeh which is trying to promote coffee produced under fair terms and then you look at their details . . . they're *barely providing* a price pennies above the world market price which is bullshit because it does nothing for the poor farmers. So, but these are organizations that are growing in Europe . . . the corporations can look like they are ethically minded – PR [public relations], so that is the biggest challenge for Fair Trade. (Martyn)

Martyn, Haley, and Jeremy are frustrated that there are other organizations claiming to be engaged in trade that is fair and they do not want consumers to have to question which certifier to "believe" and trust. Haley states that some businesses "call it fair trade but they're not certified" and she perceives that they are doing so as a "marketing" strategy, similar to

Martyn's point about businesses creating an ethical public image. Martyn explains that Ten Thousand Villages sells both "fair trade coffee" and "certified Fair Trade coffee." Following is one of the examples Martyn suggests creates immense problems for FT. He refers to a group that was:

paying \$1.92 for a pound of coffee to the co-operative. And they were promoting this coffee which *really* irks me as Fair Trade Plus. . . . I'm not gonna support because it just creates this, tension . . . I look at this as . . . four whales [in reference to his point that four large coffee corporations control 60 to 70% of the market] swimming around a big school of sardines and if . . . the sardines start fighting in themselves there's no hope for survival. . . I think we need to be united in our Fair Trade front. Otherwise we're not going to be making any inroads against big corporations. (Martyn)

Martyn highlights a crucial point about competition between various "fair" initiatives. As such, when he talks to people about FT he refers to the importance of only buying products that contain the FT logo and he believes that this will make people aware that the Rainforest Alliance is "not really Fair Trade." Jeremy states: "TransFair's job is to increase the recognizability of the label [FT logo] and for people to understand what it actually means so we can actually have a differentiation between certified Fair Trade products and other ones that are just called fair trade and then you can ask questions about them."

All interviewees discussed certification and labeling schemes other than FT, although there was variation between interviewees (i.e. not all discussed the same certifications). However, it is important to note the distinction that arose between the perspectives of interviewees. Five believe that FT is the *only* label to rely on for "fair" certification. Four have noted the benefits of other organizations which provide socially responsible products. While Ricki and Jasmine<sup>38</sup> are very supportive of FT certification and note their belief in the credibility of the organization, unlike other retailers, they pointed out that engaging in the retail of ETP is a good idea. While Donna and Jim see many benefits of FT, they believe that FT has some

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<sup>38</sup> Jasmine thinks that one of the organic teas that she sells "may be Fair Trade certified."

problems (discussed in section on **Trust**). While I have noted Jake's perspective that TransFair is the only certifier he relies on for FT, he is committed to the belief that a fully "sustainable" coffee industry is only maintained when four distinct certification labels (FT, organic, shade, and sustainable processing) are combined in a product. *All* interviewees noted the benefit of the combination of FT and organic certification (although some reasons varied, discussed in other sections of thesis).

The point is that some interviewees believe in the benefits of the growth of various 'ethical' initiatives (such as Utz Kapeh, ETP, and the Rainforest Alliance) *as an alternative to* FT. However, Ricki perceives such organizations as Utz Kapeh as "*not* competing organizations. Kind of complementary ones. Based on a theory of creating an environment where we can deal better with the farming community via coffee or whatever other product."

Jake, Jim, and Donna maintain that the combination of various certification labels on the same package is beneficial but that FT is not the only way to participate in fair trade (i.e. Donna and Jim engage in "fairly traded" coffee): "I could take you if I wanted to, to each of the farms that's producing each of the coffees that we have. We know who they are, in some cases we know them directly and others we know them through our importers. . . . to us that's fairly traded. Some of it happens to be certified by Trans Fair. Great."

Marytn sees the Rainforest Alliance as a competitor that claims to be engaged in 'fair trade'; Jake sees the RA as occupying a distinct environmental certification standard that is crucial to sustainability; Jim and Donna maintain that the RA is beneficial as an alternative certification. As Donna notes, "I happen to love this [name of coffee varietal] and it's not Fair Trade certified – it's certified by the Rainforest Alliance as being socially sustainably produced." Jim points out:

Fair Trade certified, that's not as important to us as being fairly traded, i.e. and we define that as that we're buying or the people we're buying from are buying directly from the farmer co-op and it's not going through the commodities market. And they're getting a Fair Trade price or better. . . . that *is* important so, all of our coffees meet that criteria. They may not be certified Fair Trade because as you know . . . not everybody *can be* and people want to be and they're waiting in line and they may have great coffee . . . we would still deal with them.

In the past, some producers that Donna and Jim import from (not FT) suffered because of the fluctuating commodity price of the free market and they were not making enough to cover the costs of production. Jim and Donna explained that while the accepted cost of production for coffee is US\$0.75/lb., they were only receiving US\$0.50/lb and so they "paid them a Fair Trade price, but not everybody did."

Donna notes that one of the benefits of the FT floor price is that the current commodity price for conventional coffee is US\$1.25/lb. One of the benefits of FT is that if the commodity price for coffee rises above the FT floor price, (which is US\$1.21 or \$1.19 as noted earlier, plus 5 cent premium) the commodity price will apply as the floor price, and FT guarantees an additional five cent premium above this. Donna notes that it is beneficial when the commodities' market offers a higher price for producers because the price paid by various businesses is "a lot closer together" and also "the other specialty coffee shops are going to have to be putting up their prices, right and we *won't* because we've already had to incur that cost." As such, more customers may come to their shop.

Most business decisions are made with the need to remain profitable. As such, many businesses decide to sell FT products in the interest of making a profit as they recognize the consumer preference for such products. Jake's explanation highlights one of the challenges of the Fair Trade movement in that some businesses decide to offer FT products as a choice based on the profit motive as opposed to a moral affinity for contributing to the FT movement (or the

broader sustainability movement in Jake's case, which includes FT, organic, shade-grown, and sustainably processed coffee). Jake explains that attendance at various coffee conferences enabled his business to "*really g[e]t* a clear picture of who in the [coffee] industry was really out there to do something good, noble--all with the profit motivation but regardless, still one hundred percent believed in Fair Trade, and organics, and sustainability." Jake's perception is that some people are involved in selling Fair Trade coffee in order to secure a market niche as opposed to contributing to the movement.

*Over the last ten years as specialty coffees and . . . Fair Trades and organic specifically in the specialty coffee industry really started to boom you saw a lot of other importers sort of dabbling in it and you're looking at some of the big guys in both Canada and the United States who now have sort of a Fair Trade and organic line that they're offering. So they were – sort of jumped on the bandwagon hopin' not to miss out on any of the money that was to be made and feeling the pressure from the marketplace. So, there are some of those that's sort of taken the next step and become a lot more involved in Fair Trade and organics. Others just – again, like most of the industry, just treat it like an extension and then just offer it simply because if they can make money on it great, but they don't really contribute to the whole movement. (Jake)*

I believe that it is beneficial for such organizations to maintain their distinct expertise, but collaborate. Jake maintains that it is important for various certification bodies to keep their expertise separate but also work together "as opposed to one [certification org.] thinking that they can do it all . . . have a democracy in industry." However, he states that "the problem" is that various certification organizations do not collaborate with each other. For instance, Jake explained that the international organic certification organization is "looking at social issues now as well, but I think it would be better for these organizations just simply to meet together, work together, develop programs where they're working in conjunction with one another to have the maximum benefit."

Related to their role as a seller of chocolate, Donna and Jim noted a major distinction between FT chocolate and chocolate that they purchase from another certification organization.

Jim explains that with FT, while the financial gains made by producers as opposed to participating in the commodity market are a great benefit, with FT, producers only receive the price for the cocoa and then the chocolate bar itself is manufactured outside of the cocoa-producing country. However, the chocolate they sell is manufactured in the same country in which the cocoa is grown. Jim notes that “this is actually generating some value which *I think is great*. It’s much more aligned with what we believe.” As Jim explains:

now there’s all this activity going on there [in South American country]. So, *instead of just the farmers* there are other people who are now having real jobs making something of real value whereas if you just export it you don’t get the opportunity to build that industry back so now there’s expertise and these people are learning about chocolate and doing it. So, they’re going to be able to make better chocolate.

The many people in the cocoa-producing nation in South America will benefit and will deal with international trade and shipping, which interests Jim and Donna and they claim it is “even more fair trade” than the FT chocolate that is produced in Switzerland because “Switzerland isn’t a Third World country.” If it was possible to use the same process for coffee they would definitely do so (i.e. have the producing countries roast it). But Jim notes, “[t]he problem is it doesn’t work with coffee because the coffee needs to be fresh.” In the second interview, Jim notified me that the chocolate had also become certified FT because the farmers had decided to do so. He stated that the FT certification would “help with the marketing” because it is “a bit more recognition” but this would not change the fact that the chocolate will still be made in the producing country. While allowing the manufacturing to take place in the producing country seems to make sense in many ways in terms of more money, I am not convinced that it is necessarily desired by workers to actually participate in that way. As well, while Switzerland may be rich country, this does not mean that *everybody* in Switzerland is rich; people are in need of jobs the world over in order to sustain their livelihood.



While many sellers combine various certifications in the same product, some interviewees voiced their opinion that they choose to label their packages with some of the certifications, even though they may be involved in more, in order to keep things “simple” for consumers. Jasmine notes, “I don’t even *market* some of our bird-friendly coffee, we carry it anyway. I carry it because I believe in it.” This is related to her belief that sometimes “you can just do too much.” Also, while she is interested in the work done by *another* certification organization, she is not involved in carrying products from them. Jasmine combines FT and organic in one product because of space limitations in her store. She also desires to keep things “simple” for consumers because “[t]here’s just an overwhelming amount of information out there people are bombarded with everyday. Not just coffee and you’ve gotta kinda keep it simple. Not because people are simple but because . . . it’s just too much all the time.”

All of the coffee sold by Jeremy is certified FT and certified organic, and some is certified bird-friendly. All of the bags of coffee include the information about FT and organic, but not the bird-friendly. He states, “we don’t put a whole lot of those other certifications on there [coffee bag] just because it’s confusing. But also because I think ya need to make it simple and really build the brand recognition of the TransFair trademark because it doesn’t have a huge -- people don’t really *know* about it too much in Canada.”

### **Money, Time, and Effort by Fair Trade Licensees with Unsatisfactory Results**

Two interviewees reveal some frustrations that they encounter in their dealings as licensees with FT. Donna and Jim are struggling with the fact that while they are honest participants in the FT program, they feel that they are not trusted by TransFair. Such feelings result from the great amount of detail required for the submission of reports<sup>39</sup> related to FT

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<sup>39</sup> While Jake and Jasmine both refer to the fact that they have to do paperwork, which they suggest is not a very exciting activity, they were not as disgruntled and explained that it is just how FT works.

certification. Donna explains that it takes her “three to five days to produce these [very detailed] reports.” She states: “I mean it’s *just stupid*. Every three months. Stupid.” In contrast, they find the reporting process for another certification initiative that they are involved with to be “really simple.” They are also dissatisfied that TransFair has not taken on a more active role in terms of monitoring the use of the “Fair Trade” phrase and logo in order to find people who are misusing them. Donna did not “resent” preparing the report and counting the coffee beans until TransFair “refused to protect . . . the phrase fair trade by somebody clearly not certified and not participating in the program.” Donna and Jim are frustrated by the contradiction they’ve experienced whereby TransFair Canada has many “checks and balances” in order to make sure that licensees are “not cheating”, while, at the same time, they explain that there are “people cheating . . . using the *whole* [FT] *phrase who aren’t even participating in the program* and I’m supposed to not be resentful. It’s just . . . *really preposterous*.” Jim and Donna’s participation in FT has led them to believe that TransFair “*distrust[s] the people who signed up*”, while the organization simultaneously fails to stop the practice of retailers who use the ‘fair trade’ phrase and offer little or no FT products. They have contacted TransFair to point them towards people and businesses that are misusing the ‘fair trade’ phrase but Donna and Jim were not pleased with the inaction of TransFair:

they [TransFair Canada] don’t spend any time as far as I can tell on surveillance to make sure people are using the logo properly and are using the terms properly because what happens is *a lot* of companies out there will join up and maybe have one or two Fair Trade coffees and then they say, “Oh yeah, yeah, I know we have Fair Trade, blah, blah, blah.” And you go and you buy the coffee you might think you’re buying Fair Trade coffee but you’re not, they’re not doing it properly. . . . and furthermore there’s companies like [name] that we’ve complained about where they say they’ve got Fair Trade certified beans and they’re not a . . . licensee and so we complain and they say, “Oh, you know we can’t stop ‘em because it’s not trademarked.” (Jim)

Jim states that if TransFair Canada does not work toward ensuring the “meaning” of the FT logo “by enforcing the rules then I will ultimately be spending that money somewhere else.” While I empathize with Jim and Donna’s concerns about the fact that some businesses claim to be engaged in FT when in fact they are not, or only sell *some* FT coffee, it occurs to me that it is somewhat ironic that Jim and Donna are so concerned about this issue when not all of the coffee *they* sell is FT, as they participate in selling “fairly traded” coffee that is not FT certified. While they emphasize that they distinguish very clearly between FT certified and fairly traded coffee (non-certified), which is very important, their slight alteration of the “fair trade” phrase appears to in many ways contradict their point about people using the phrase when they should not be. I do not think that Jim and Donna would agree with my argument. My main point is that for customers who are new to FT and trying to understand what it is about, it is extremely confusing and, in my opinion, detracts from the FT certification initiative when sellers use the phrase “fairly traded” for non-certified coffee.<sup>40</sup> I suggest that a much more distinct phrase be used to distinguish their “fairly traded” coffee from *certified FT* coffee<sup>41</sup> Or, as I believe would be much better, switch to selling entirely FT certified coffee.

I include a detailed quote below about the “onerous” task of filling out the report because I believe the specific questions that Donna suggests as acceptable and those that are not provides important specific details as it relates TransFair’s potential interest in hearing about such concerns. This could result in them taking action to re-design the report questions to make it more user-friendly for people who have to fill out the reports:

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<sup>40</sup> As noted elsewhere, I do not deny that such fairly traded exchanges perhaps greatly benefit producers, sellers, and consumers. Yet, as I argue throughout, one of the main reasons FT is important is because of its challenge to capitalist relations of production in terms of democratic organizational forms, (i.e. co-ops) as Hudson and Hudson’s (2003, 2004) work details.

<sup>41</sup> However, I must admit that I have no ideas for a possible alternative term/phrase.

for them to actually mistrust me who was a willing, and happy, and active participant in the thing to the point that they do, that they're counting what comes in and what I roast in every roast, . . . how much inventory I have, and I have to go through and do an *unbelievably*, I mean there's no way that the roasters are filling these out correctly. . . . And they're wasting my time and for what, like in what way is this helping the end goal? And the answer to me is, *it's not*. It just isn't. On the other hand, the [name of other certification] they also have a program that requires that we pay them royalties so obviously you have to count something. They ask us, "How many bags did you buy? How many pounds did you sell green? How many pounds did you sell roasted?" I write it down and I send it in and write the cheque. Really, really simple. So, somebody's *really* got that wrong somewhere and they need to fix it, in my opinion.

I: So, you actually have to count the beans.

RR: Well not the individual beans, like the weight. . . . not just here's what I bought, here's what I sold, but here's where it went into a blend, and ended up not going out as a TransFair certified thing. Here's where it went out under a different name and here's how it got roasted, oh and I dropped a cup of coffee on this and had to throw it out. (Donna)

Jim ("there's *way too much* time and effort spent counting the beans once they're here and trying to figure out who's cheating the system") and Donna interpret the requirement of answering very detailed report-questions as an indication that TransFair does not "trust" their business. Martyn's interpretation of TransFair's audits is that they are to ensure that people who sell FT coffee are "not cheating": "TransFair demands of anybody who sells, who's a licensee that they need to every year show them the books. How much did you buy, how much did you roast, how much did you lose, so that they can make sure that they are not cheating."

They also believe that the fees they pay are not being used as they had hoped. Donna has no problem with "*paying a royalty*" to TransFair.<sup>42</sup> However, she suggests that they "*spend it on somethin' useful*" as does another certification organization they support: "I'm not just supporting some white guy in Ottawa to sit there and act important." Jim points out that they pay an additional fee/pound on the FT coffee, which they send to TransFair Canada. However, while he is happy that TransFair does spend money on "some promotion of the program", he is not pleased with the fact that the financial statements indicate that "most of the money we send is

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<sup>42</sup> Jim states that the FT coffee "is always more expensive" for them to purchase than the non-FT and he thinks that this is likely due to "some money going in royalties to . . . probably USA TransFair."

going to the salaries of the people who work there.” Jim notes: “we’re concerned about how much money . . . comes out of here and doesn’t go to the farms and . . . is administering it all because there’s a huge overhead.” Jim explains:

I wish that they [TransFair Canada] would promote the program [Fair Trade] better than they do. I think the awareness is relatively low. I think it could be better . . . they do some things but they don’t seem to be particularly effective and helpful to us. . . . I think they could be . . . getting the message out there a little better, but that’s what I thought when we signed up that the money was going for.

Jim also states: “I don’t know what they do with that money, I don’t know cause they don’t communicate that well.”

He and Donna are frustrated about other issues that have arisen through their dealings with TransFair Canada. For instance, they spent a great deal of time putting two TransFair stickers on each bag of FT coffee, as required. When they ran out of stickers and called TransFair to order more, they were told that there were no stickers available. They were confused when the TransFair people said that they were considering no longer requiring these stickers. Donna and Jim were not pleased because they had spent a lot of time and money ensuring that they were abiding by the rules laid out by TransFair: “if they decided to drop it the first thing they shoulda done is contact us all and say, ‘Look, you know if you’re puttin’ these stickers on, ah, forget it . . . cause we’re not gonna require it anymore’” (Jim). I absolutely agree that TransFair should have contacted the licensees to notify them of this change.

A second issue that frustrated Jim and Donna was that TransFair invited them to a symposium and when they called to confirm they were told that they were no longer invited, which seems very inappropriate from my perspective.

Thirdly, their business was “dropped” from the TransFair website, and the re-design of the site is ineffective from Jim’s perspective:

I just noticed well, gee we don't get any referrals from the TransFair website anymore and you look at it and there's like [name of two businesses] were the only ones who had links so I guess they're the favored ones right and what are you doing, doing this thing half-assed. (Jim)

R: Like they used to have a nice list of licensees and you can just click on the map and . . . then it would come up and now you have to do all these searches and it doesn't work. And we've complained about it and so, for the, for the money we were sending at least we were getting constant leads [referrals from website]. Now, we don't get those anymore so it just reduced their usefulness from our point of view.

I: Wow, yeah.

R: . . . if I'm a member of the program then presumably I'd get some benefits and I'm getting less and less all the time. So, yeah, they've re-designed the website and it's really not working *at all*. (Jim)

While this section has highlighted Jim and Donna's frustrations and "problems" with FT, they explain: "there are people who understand what [FT] certification is and I like what it's doing on the other end [for producers] and there's a lot about it that I support and . . . as frustrated as I am about all that I do want to be clear that I support the program, it's good, but it's not as good as it could be in my opinion." Yet, immediately after praising FT, Donna goes on to say: "*a much better* choice . . . is [name of certifier], I think they are doing it much, much better." They explain that they will continue to seek out "alternative certifications until we find ones that we like better [than FT]" (Jim).

### **Targeting Consumers/Marketing Initiatives: High Quality & the Fair Trade Message as Secondary**

The implications of prioritizing marketing the high quality of the product, as opposed to the FT aspect, means that consumers may simply buy the product based on taste and not recognize that the product is FT. Effectively, this can lead to people participating in the FT market (which *does* benefit producers, and in some ways can be understood as participation in the movement because the market is one component of the movement), but not becoming *actively engaged* in the movement (i.e. movement politics, social conscience, and social

activism). Participation in the movement component is key to the success of FT. However, in order to sustain a business and garner a customer base, sellers must focus on marketing their products as high quality.

What are the benefits and downsides for FT as a movement if products are marketed based on their high quality as a primary focus (with FT as a secondary message), as opposed to marketing a product based on its FT certification (that happens to be of high quality)? Does a focus on high quality, as a strategy for targeting consumers, detract from the social justice and ethical components of the FT message? Does a focus on quality attract consumers who otherwise may never have heard of FT and therefore expand the movement?

Nicholls' (2002:14) semi-structured in-depth interviews with five "influential parties" involved in the marketing of fair trade products in the UK revealed that "one of the main difficulties for many fair trade products has been the lingering consumer perception that they are 'worthy' but of generally indifferent quality – what might be called the 'charity shop' image." Salazar-Lewis, "new product development manager at Cafédirect," explains: 'It's not that we wanted to do it that way [marketing the quality of the product as opposed to Fair Trade aspect], it just came out in all the different studies that they are more concerned about the quality of the product than the fair trade element . . . so we have to respond to that if we want to carry on in the market basically' (quoted in Nicholls 2002:14).

In some instances, consumers' self-interest in a quality product means that upon purchase of FT coffee, they may have access to information about FT that they may not have heard about through other means. While a public educational event about FT may not pique a particular person's interest, a high quality cup of coffee may inspire them to be a repeat customer and potentially to ask more about the FT aspect of the product.

However, according to Nicholls' (2005:190) more recent research, there has been a "shift" in how consumers evaluate FT product quality as "consumer perception [of Fair Trade] has changed from seeing Fair Trade products as marginal and poor quality to viewing them as mainstream and high quality." He (190) notes that this shift in image is partly due to the retailing of FT products in various high-end shops, such as Starbucks, as opposed to "charity shop/alternative trading organization/church contexts."

Many interviewees referred to the misconceptions of the association of low quality and FT products and the importance of recognizing and promoting the high quality of the FT coffee in order to counteract this belief. Jeremy notes that one of the challenges faced as a seller of FT coffee is "to get people to get over this idea that it's gonna taste bad. Either it's Fair Trade it's gonna taste bad. Or it's organic, it's gonna taste bad, it's kinda weird." Jeremy related a "huge victory" in which he was giving out samples of FT coffee at a place to which they wholesale. A customer who initially claimed: 'I always find that natural stuff tastes bitter', decided to taste the coffee and to Jeremy's amusement exclaimed that 'it's the best coffee I've ever had in this place.' Martyn and Jeremy point out that FT coffee has not always tasted good and it is important to promote the fact that the quality has improved, which Martyn believes has "helped the Fair Trade movement a great deal because people see, 'Oh, Fair Trade coffee's also good coffee.'" Martyn states that even when the quality was bad "people bought it for social justice reasons" but now it's possible to simply sell it based on the quality.

Some interviewees are not convinced that FT equals quality. Jake pointed out that while the coffee that they sell is of high quality, "Fair Trade doesn't mean quality." Jasmine was hesitant to carry FT coffee because she did not think the quality was good enough:

I tasted quite a number of Fair Trade coffees at that time [mid and late '90s] ... and I felt that there was only one that possibly qualified as a quality coffee. It's a Guatemalan



actually and nothing else I felt was very distinctive for a discerning coffee lover and I mean we really cater to very specialized coffee drinkers so I decided initially that we were not gonna be carrying this *not because* . . . it was the right or the wrong thing to do, but because . . . it really contravened my own personal set of beliefs which is why would you pay a premium for an inferior product? Period. (laugh). (Jasmine)

She believes that “it’s probably only been in the last couple of years that the product quality is coming up” and that the “qualities still need to” improve. Jasmine was encouraged by customer demand to offer FT as an option despite the lower quality of some of it.

Ricki came across a statement in a newspaper that said that the quality of FT coffee is “substandard” but he explains that he “start[s] with quality. . . . if the quality is not there people will try it but they won’t be [a] repeat customer.” His perception is that people make an “association with . . . doing good [i.e. FT] and substandard products.” He believes: “people associate right now higher standards with organic, not as much with Fair Trade. So, that’s how I set it up and it’s less preachy and . . . it’s a win-win situation because . . . consumers are *not that well-versed* in how to make a decision on what’s good. They have to be told.” Ricki is not advocating literally *telling* people which product to choose but his perspective is that products educate consumers and it is his role to provide choice for consumers. He refers to his role as a seller of FT to make the decision for consumers to purchase FT as “seamless as possible” which is related to his strong belief in not being “preachy.” Ricki’s experience exemplifies his belief that: “people don’t like it in their face. People just sort of want to naturally gel into it [FT]. They don’t want to be told, ‘Why aren’t you doing this? You should be doing this.’” People in business have to be strategic. If they encourage consumers to choose one product, such as FT, over another, they may lose customers. However, while Ricki must be strategic, other businesses, in which the *focus* is *only* selling FT (Haley, Jeremy) or *only* fairly traded (Donna/Jim) or organized around the concept of sustainability (Jake), do not need to be strategic

in the same way and do not need to take on the role of the neutral, objective retailer. Ricki's perception is that "a very, very small percentage will actually go out and do their own research and make that conscious decision as to what to do and how to buy." However, in my analysis, FT has been able to expand as much as it has *because* consumers have indeed taken the initiative to educate themselves, demand/suggest that sellers offer FT coffee (e.g. Jasmine's customers, Simon's activism), learn about FT, and participate in educational efforts, for example.

Jim and Donna explain that when they sell coffee they are "not selling guilt" but are instead "adding value" which means that the coffee "beans are better beans, so that's how they're commanding the higher price. Then we're roasting individual batches with special care and we're managing the roasting. So that's something that other folks aren't typically doing. So, that's value that we can add. Not only has it been added at the other end but we're keeping up the standards when it gets to here." Jeremy also highlights the importance of acknowledging the producers' role in growing a high quality coffee bean by subsequently marketing the coffee based on the excellent quality of the bean. Jeremy explains his focus on targeting consumers with excellent tasting (i.e. high quality) coffee that is also FT and organic:

we want to take advantage of this sophistication in the palate by producing high quality, micro-roasted gourmet coffees for our customers that are certified organic and Fair Trade. We don't want people to buy our coffee because it's Fair Trade. We want people to buy our coffee because it tastes really good. And by doing that then we respect the work that the producers have done because they've done *a lot* of work to try to produce a high quality bean and we gotta take that work and add to it by roasting it and brewing it the right way or making really good espresso drinks so that . . . respect and that quality is carried all the way up to people's mouths.

Jim explains the focus of offering quality coffee that tastes really great that happens to have been produced under fair, sustainable conditions: "what we're selling you is a really good cup of coffee *that happens to have* all these other good things happening so if you care about all these

other good things you can buy our coffee. If you *really just want a good cup of coffee* you can buy our coffee.” Jim additionally states that large coffee corporations “have so much clout in the market and we . . . have to fight it everyday. But if we’re enough of a pain in the ass to them then maybe they’ll start doing a few more things.” Donna and Jim are fairly recent newcomers to the business and their “next phase is to get that message out a little bit more once we’ve got this sort of under control we’ll be . . . more public in talking because we need to turn it up another level so that people get the message” (Jim). (For Donna and Jim the “message” is about more than *just* FT, as discussed). They printed an article/ad in a local publication about bird-friendly coffee and suggested that the next one will be about FT, both with the aim of pointing about how to distinguish certified from non-certified. “I mean *obviously we’re trying to sell coffee* but if we don’t sell coffee we won’t be able to execute the mission. But we’re trying to educate people and say, ‘Look, these are the issues and . . . if you just think about it, it’ll do some good’” (Jim).

Some of the sellers I spoke with appear to be more involved in the market aspect of FT as opposed to the broader movement (i.e. FT does not translate into aspects of their life outside of their business). Perhaps this is related to the fact that FT represents a contradiction for them because as sellers, they must operate in accordance with capitalism, yet, FT challenges capitalism, in some ways (as discussed). However, even those who are deeply involved in the FT movement as activists and practitioners note the importance of promoting the quality of the product.

Jake explains that as a seller of coffee they are selling “a fantastic cup of coffee” and other components of the coffee are considered secondary: “Whether you care about sustainability, Fair Trade, organics, or not, that’s the second part of the message and that’s

something that's interwoven throughout our business. There's a lot of people who don't care. They wanna buy a great cup of coffee. Some just don't give a shit that the farmer's not getting paid a fair price." Many people purchase food products based on the fact that they like the taste. If consumers like the taste of the coffee, the farmers reap the benefits of FT, regardless of whether the consumer is aware of what they are supporting. While "a good portion" of Jake's customers are interested in "sustainability and the whole philosophy" he explains that other customers are not. Jake's business carries a small amount of coffee from certain countries that are "exceptions" in that the certification organizations his company is involved in do not certify coffees from these particular locations. They carry such coffees to please customers who are only interested in "the prestige" associated with buying these particular coffees and do not care about FT, etcetera.

Martyn notes that "[q]uality will dictate. If it's really good quality, people will buy it *because* it's good *and* it's Fair Trade, *and* it's organic. So, but a lot of people will buy it just because it's good." He has not heard of anybody trying FT coffee from a particular local independent coffee shop who has thought the coffee tasted bad. "They've all loved it and a lot of them have switched [to FT]" (Martyn). Martyn believes that high quality is "not necessarily true" with FT coffee that is sold in large chains.

Many interviewees have made the important point that many people will purchase FT products based solely on their excellent taste. This may encourage other people to take part in FT who would not do so otherwise. Jeremy is certain that it is essential to getting people to be repeat customers to approach the promotion of FT coffee from the aspect of the quality of the taste: "Gotta get 'em [customers] first with flavor . . . you can have the most righteous coffee in the world and if it tastes bad then nobody's gonna buy it." He points out that the "intellectual"

aspect is the second part of the approach to encouraging new consumers: “get ‘em with the taste buds first, then pull the heartstrings.”

While quality of taste is important, educating consumers about FT and organics is also a key component of many interviewees’ businesses, more so for some than others, and not a focus at all for some. For Jeremy, education is a huge component. Jeremy states: “If they become our customers they learn about” FT. For instance, he explains:

when people come into our shop, it’s also pretty obvious that Fair Trade is important to us. . . . all the people that work there are dedicated to the notion of Fair Trade and are able to talk about it and explain it to people and if it’s a new customer then we usually say, “Hey, you’re new here. . . . let me tell you about our coffee.”

It appears that some sellers realize that their customers do not necessarily care about the fact that the coffee that they sell is FT. These sellers take an approach to business that is in line with their values and they hope that customers respond favorably. Jim and Donna note that “most” of the customers do not care about the “values” but once people become their customers they learn about their approach to business.

Haley’s primary initial marketing strategy was convenience. However, she soon realized that advertising that her coffee is FT was important because many customers (she claims “probably” 80%) bought the coffee *because* of the fact that it was FT, so she began to advertise both the FT and organic aspect: “seriously, I didn’t pick Fair Trade because I thought it was gonna be a good marketing tool.” She originally believed that she was “going to promote” FT, and was surprised that so many customers already knew about it.

One of the reasons I wanted to speak with sellers who sell FT as an option was to find out if they are considering selling FT exclusively and why or why not. Jasmine is not interested in doing so because the quality does not meet her expectations and also because she does not believe that all coffee needs to be FT because the price paid is high enough. She carries “some

exclusive coffees” that are not available as FT and as customers are interested in such coffees there is no reason for her to stop selling it. She did say that if she had a larger place she would carry additional FT coffee. Ricki explains that it does not make sense for him to “drastically change” his product offerings as in so doing he would lose many customers and the business itself would lose money. He states, “I wanna grow through it. So, in five years time if everything evolves into Fair Trade, great. Then that’s fine. If it doesn’t, I’m not necessarily failing in attempting to do something with sort of a social conscience.” While Ricki’s interest/sale of FT is an altruistic act, his self-interest in terms of sustaining his business requires *not* selling only FT. However, for Jasmine, *providing* the option of FT for her customers *is a self-interested* move in order to *sustain* her customer base who wants access to FT coffee, (while she simultaneously feels good about participating in FT she is clear that she would *definitely not* do so if it did not sell).

### **Educating People & Raising Awareness about Fair Trade**

The success of the FT movement is greatly impacted by marketing initiatives and educational efforts. The promotion of *both* the high quality *and* the FT component of the product appears to be the most beneficial approach for the expansion of FT because it encourages people to try FT products who otherwise may not do so if they perceive they are of an inferior quality. Education is key to increasing awareness of FT and encouraging people to become involved in the movement.

While some sellers are focused on educating consumers about FT, others focus more heavily on being a successful business, which is certainly a necessary component of existing in a competitive, capitalist society. Sellers are an extremely important component of the FT movement as it is a consumer movement and interested individuals need to be able to have

access to FT products; as more businesses become involved in the sale of FT products, this is one part of a strategy of expanding the FT movement, in terms of product availability. While educational initiatives are part of the focus for some businesses, others focus primarily on providing information, which are two distinct actions. Some sellers are also involved in activism (i.e. creating spaces for critical engagement), as opposed to being a facilitator of a brochure. However, there is not a clear-cut dichotomy between all of these aspects.

Jake is focused on contributing to a sustainable coffee industry, to benefit coffee growers in producing countries, and to be a successful business. He “provid[es] information to the coffee drinking population about sustainability, about Fair Trade, about organics, about quality of taste.” Jake notes, “I think that *everybody* really wants to support it [FT]. It’s a question of having the information, the understanding, making a decision.” Simon believes people are interested in supporting such things as FT, once they find out about it: “I found . . . that with a little bit of effort, and a little bit of consciousness raising, that people were open to this [Fair Trade] because people are challenged and *baffled* about what to do and most people *I think* are genuinely concerned about these issues but, at the end of the day *don’t* know what to do.”

Jake’s business provides an educational activity for certain customers, which they “will be going to the public with . . . at some point when we have more time and more resources” which delves into issues such as “quality” of the coffee and the different tastes of the coffee depending on where it’s from and “the second most . . . important message that we’re trying to get which is all about sustainable coffee”:

so we . . . discuss conventional growing and processing. We compare it to our sustainable model and try to illustrate how ultimately it produces a better cup of coffee because now you’re paying a farmer to actually care about the product that they’re producing and you’re *really* moving coffee back from low-lying areas back into the tops of mountains, into the rainforest where it happens to grow better. Again, attributing to quality but at the same

time there's that whole philosophical benefit that it's not hurting the earth and it's not exploiting people in the process.

Jake provides "access to information", but the consumer is the agent in terms of decisions: "Definitely here to educate but not to tell them right from wrong. They have to make that decision themselves. But ultimately we don't care. As long as they're buying our product they're getting a fully . . . sustainable product. Or, a product that's working toward sustainability." The consumer can learn from the information provided by Jake "how their product is grown, processed, bought, sold, prepared for them." He suggests that "hopefully the information that they have access to they're gonna read, they're gonna think about, maybe it's gonna help them change the way that they buy other products. . . . it's not about lowest or cheapest price, . . . at some point someone's gonna suffer for it and that's not fair." Businesses can act as facilitators of social change because they provide access to the product and information, while allowing consumer agency to determine the decisions. If the product is available at a competitive price, consumers may be inclined to participate. However, some businesses offer FT products *because of* consumer demand. Customer demand and seller initiative are inter-connected, with both factors often influencing each other.

Haley believes it is of vital importance to educate more people about FT. "[P]robably 20%" of her customer base does not know about it and she thinks they likely buy from her because of "convenience" or "the price." She says that "they're curious and they start asking so that's the people that I want to attract. I want more people to be aware of it."

Ricki believes that education, in general, about FT is "very important" and that "with the education people sometimes also begin to feel a bit of pressure and then they become more aware and they kind of make that decision":



you tell one person, tell two people, tells three people, tells five people. Ten people will read . . . your thesis and one person'll just the light'll switch on, . . . you're bombarded with information. How can you keep up? How do you know? Where's your shirt made from? Where's your shoes made from? . . . what do you eat and where does it come from? . . . you kind of position yourself and what you believe in and what you wanna do and so education never hurts. *Awareness never* hurts. You cannot force somebody to do something.

Jim and Donna talk about the importance of getting the message out about trading fairly and sustainability. They "promote the use of sustainable products wherever" possible: "they can either buy 'em or not. And they either do or not." It would please them if they were put "out of a role" by other companies adopting similar fairly traded, environmental and sustainable philosophies and they "would be happy if everybody demanded sustainably produced coffee, fairly traded coffee from all of their suppliers because that would have a huge impact":

we started this to . . . help educate people in the impact that their coffee purchases could have. . . . if the really big guys [corporations] sort of caught onto that and got the message and then that would be great, right? I mean that's really what we wanted to do. I would do something else, I mean there's many other things I could do some of them might be more profitable (laugh) certainly less tiring but . . . that would be a sign that we . . . helped get the message through.

. . . .  
if you look at their literature they all sort of pay lip service to all that stuff but it's a small part of their production, right? I mean if we shifted bigger parts and it would make their life a little harder because you'd be dealing now with almost by definition smaller farms and family-run operations and . . . it's harder work, but the world would be so much better off for it and I'd be delighted . . . to be put out of business like that other than through some kind of price war with some big company that can afford it, right, which is more than likely what would happen they open up next door and . . . steal all your customers, but, . . . I'd be *really happy* if we didn't need to do it. If there wasn't *the need* – if I didn't see *the need* to actually be *doing it for that*. I mean we do it for other reasons, *I actually really enjoy it*.

Jim explains that they "tell people, we are educating them, they are learning, and some of them are gettin' it. . . . And the ones who come here often enough they get the story over and over again." Jeremy notes that education is "*huge* because. . . that's what it's all about really."

Jeremy is intensely involved in education about FT and one of the things he would like to do is

“develop some [educational] units for schools.” Through another avenue Jeremy has been promoting FT since about the late 1980’s and he would talk about issues of FT in “primary schools and universities and church groups as well and community groups but primarily it was high school.” Talking about FT and connecting it to people’s lives in a way that they will be able to understand varies depending on the group:

sometimes I talk to high schools. It depends. . . . I used to do *a lot* of stuff in high schools and I don’t so much anymore and so I’m a little out of practice but it depends on the group. . . . it’s hard to talk to people about this kind of thing if it’s *really* disconnected from their lives so I gotta . . . find ways to make those connections to them.

I: So, you found that in some ways in the high school when you would try to talk about it [it] was difficult because of the disconnection?

R: Yeaah. . . . and also, sometimes it’s hard to understand. ‘Cause it is a pretty complex thing. It really depends.

Jeremy noted that often Catholic schools are more susceptible to the message of FT “because social justice is part of their curriculum”, as opposed to public schools and private Christian schools. He explains that if you talk “about Fair Trade at a Catholic school they know what you’re talkin’ about. You go to a public school and you might not find anybody there who knows what the heck you’re talkin’ about.” Martyn’s experience appears to reveal more receptiveness in terms of schools. However, I am unaware as to whether the schools Martyn refers to are religious, public and/or private. Martyn notes that one of the challenges with FT is “un-awareness” and the need to “educate people.” He refers to various avenues for education such as “promoting it in stores, schools, events, public forums maybe. Get it more exposed on TV, radio, print, so there’s lots of opportunity to do it, just need the time to do it.” He explains that the FT volunteer group that he is involved with does presentations about FT in schools. However, he does not take part in this activity because of his conflicting work schedule. Martyn explains that “[p]eople don’t realize . . . where their products are coming from and what is the living conditions of these people and we need to educate people and I think a great way of doing

that is schools. Get to the kids, teach kids about this in schools. And I think more and more this is happening in school.” The presentations are “geared to sixteen to nineteen year olds, even maybe even college level can be catered.” He notes that many of the high school students are knowledgeable about “trans-nationals” and globalization” but their focus is to teach from a “more local, more grass-roots level” while also connecting it to the global.

Jeremy offered some examples of why it’s important to approach different groups from different angles, while still maintaining the core message and inviting people to participate.

While this is tied in with a business success strategy, Jeremy is very committed to the FT movement:

the message isn’t different, it’s just the amount of detail on that particular aspect that you go into. So, for example there was a woman from [name of university] who wanted to talk to me about *just* Fair Trade. So I didn’t really talk much about the coffee component, or about the flavor, right or the organics, I don’t even think I talked about the organics and that’s because her interest was in understanding Fair Trade whereas if I go to a church group you wanna talk to them about flavor, a little bit about organics, but you wanna also talk about the church connection to Fair Trade and how . . . historically churches have supported Fair Trade and how in the US a lot of churches buy Fair Trade -- just so that they don’t feel that this is something new. Whereas, if I did a Council of Canadians group I wouldn’t talk about the church connection I’d talk more about the politics and economic democracy component. And then, like, for example, I did a presentation to the people at universities who manage the campus drinking establishments

. . . .

I made a presentation to that with my sales guy and of course . . . we started out talking about, how do you differentiate yourself on campus and it was also about how do you make more money selling Fair Trade, how do you differentiate yourself and that’s through a better tasting coffee and the Fair Trade component in terms of explaining what it was at the end and it wasn’t that detailed.

Education and/or providing information is a component of the strategy for many sellers.

Some sellers are more vociferous than others about why it is important to choose FT and/or fairly traded products. Some talk with customers about why it is important to choose FT, while others make the information accessible through various things such as brochures, the Internet, videos.

For the interviewee who decided to go the route of FT due to customer demand, education does not seem to be an important issue. Martyn's role as an activist is supportive of businesses that promote and educate about FT. He states: "how do you compete against these kind of organizations [corporations] unless you talk about organic and Fair Trade and try to get people to buy and vote for their dollar. It's raising awareness."

Donna notes that "for the whole thing to make sense it has to be mainstream, right? Our mission can't be accomplished . . . selling to the converted." Part of their strategy was to locate their business where there is less awareness of issues that their business is involved in, in order to bring the message to other people. They highlight that the closer one is to the "centre" and certain location of a particular city, (which they named) the higher the awareness of FT. Outside of that niche, there is less awareness:

R [Jim]: the further out you get the less people know about it, less people care about it and, I guess that's the way--

RR [Donna]: Information disseminates.

R: disseminates or it's the kind of people – the politics, the people, whatever, right?

Whatever it is – I mean I haven't thought about it . . . but that's what I've noticed – and the further out you get, the scarcer they become. So, we're kind of one step out and I think that makes a lot of sense because if you're going to spread the word then you wanna be kinda one step out and then someone else can go and do it the next step and then the next step.

As highlighted by some interviewees, a huge challenge is that people do not know what FT actually is about. Martyn states that the "biggest challenge is to get people to understand what Fair Trade is and what certified Fair Trade is." Jeremy notes that "people don't really *know* about it [Fair Trade and the TransFair Canada trademark] too much in Canada. And that's the big challenge right there. We gotta get people to know what it is." However, awareness and knowledge of FT is increasing and Jeremy says that "recognition of the logo by Canadians is increasing."

While Ricki offers brochures and information about FT he completely refrains from asking customers who are not buying FT why they are not doing so: “when you come in and you buy something you’re *never* lectured.” Of course, Ricki’s business could potentially suffer, and likely would, if he were to encourage consumers to choose one product over another, e.g. FT coffee as opposed to non-FT. When a person is in business, any sale is good for business. While Ricki’s personal interest in FT drives his decision to carry FT coffee as a choice for consumers, he must also maintain his business in order for it to survive (i.e. he must continue to provide the non-FT coffee that some of his consumer base relies on).

### **Fair Trade as an Imposed Structure?: Northern Criteria & Southern Agency**

Jeremy refers to the fact that FLO’s rules are imposed but he believes in the importance of FT certification and 100% of the coffee that he sells is FT certified. So, he is an ardent supporter of FT. He believes the rules are “important”, while highlighting that it is important that all people are “comfortable” with them. Most importantly, Jeremy notes that the rules should apply both ways so as to move away from a neocolonial relationship (discussed in more detail in **Ch. Three**).

However, Jim and Donna talk in a different manner about the downsides of Northern FT standards as an imposition on Southern producers. They have a problem with some of the requirements that FT producers must comply with in order to take part in FT and they do not believe that FT is the only way to engage in trading fairly. They participate in projects in which the farmers and community members in the South initiate the projects. They state the problems with the North dictating the FT guidelines:

RR: . . . [it] is the North American’s telling *them* how they have to organize in order to participate

R: Yes.

RR: in the program, right. It's not like it came out of their idea – right? It wasn't *their* – “Oh, here's what we should do.” Right? It was the North Americans who – who in their righteous wisdom, I'll say, went down there and said, “O.k., here's the way we're gonna do it.” . . . to me that's problematic as opposed to the [name of project in country in South America] story where the women got together amongst themselves and decided to take their coffee outside of the normal production and that's *just brilliant*, right?

RR: I mean, yes, it's a similar model and everything but *they decided to do it*, right?  
(Donna and Jim)

We have some friends who are going to be customers of ours and they're from [country in South America] and, and they feel similar to what we do that they were saying it is a lot like being from South America, being told what to do by the North. *Again*. . . that's part of the thing about co-ops and the family farms or whatever, right. I mean they're being *told* that well, this is the only acceptable way you can organize yourself to be in this program. *And I* have some concerns about that. I think that's incorrect. . . I think it is the North again telling the South what to do. (Jim)

While I agree with Donna and Jim's sentiment about the immense historical problems with the North determining the actions of the South in a variety of forms, it does not seem that FT certification is premised on imposing and telling producers what to do. However, Jim and Donna's main problem with FT is related to the requirement of co-op structures in the South in order to participate. They refer to some projects that they are affiliated with in South America:

unlike an imposed solution, what happens is they [women coffee producers in South American country] started just hearing about what other people were doing and they decided themselves that hey maybe there's something we can do and they got together and they started asking [name of woman] and some other people, “What can we do?” . . . *they came up with their own* answer which was let's pull our production out of the regular production. Even the Fair Trade co-op production. Let's pull ours out separately and as part of that participate in the decision-making with the males, participate in the decision-making in the exporting process . . . and their first crop is now out and we have it and [name of woman] is the one who imports it into North America and she will only sell it to [a coffee roaster], on a contract with a woman's [coffee roaster's] signature. (Donna)

One of the *key insights* gained from this commentary is the fact that the FT certification process was not assisting the women which highlights the importance of a gender analysis in terms of FT certification. Jeremy is also involved and interested in this initiative and explains that the issue was that “the women who are part of these [FT] co-ops wanted to have their own money” and

they effectively organized themselves, in order to meet their needs. So, while the coffee *is* also FT certified, the initiative of the women and the positive achievements are extremely beneficial:

R [Jim]: And it's grass-roots . . . and it's . . . everybody working together instead of imposing some structure on, on people who wouldn't necessarily benefit from it. And that one is Fair Trade certified.

RR [Donna]: It is Fair Trade . . . because they are farms that were actually participating in a different Fair Trade coffee previously, but it wasn't helping the women. The other thing that's really cool about the story just while I'm at it is [name] was noticing that . . . now the women are getting money. The women have never had money before. Well, guess what, they're spending it on different stuff because they've traditionally been taking care of the home and the kids so they've been spending it on infrastructure and education. That's not what the men were spending it on (laughs). Now, that is so cool. (Donna and Jim).

However, ironically, they also referred positively to the fact that their friends/importers work hard to encourage producers to grow a better bean and in doing so they will pay them two cents better than the FT price. This pressure to produce a higher quality commodity to get a few cents seems to me to *be an imposition* and form of pressure from the Northern importers, although Jim and Donna do not see it as such: "People just love it [coffee from project]. So, again, it's not just o.k., well the women produce it and it's got this great story and isn't that neat. [name of person affiliated with project] went down there and said, 'No, no, no we have to make this better than the other coffee'" (Donna). As such, Donna explained that their importer/friend conveys the following message about improving quality: "'No, no, no, no, that cherry isn't ripe. You can't pick that one because you have to produce a better coffee . . . you can't leave that, that extra five minutes cause it's convenient cause *you* have to produce a better coffee because we're gonna give you two cents above the Fair Trade price.'"

Jake explains the notion of not imposing, but rather encouraging farmers to become involved with FT and the other certifications that their business is interested in order to satisfy the desire of Northern consumers to have a label on the coffee which provides consumers with a belief in the trustworthiness in the certification process. He notes that they typically begin to

locate farmers by starting with those who are already on the FT Register. Jake explains that “the whole point” of his company’s program is “not to impose but to work with . . . and they [producers] contributed to what the definition of sustainability was as far as the certification that we created with [name of group]. But in no way, shape or form are we saying that you do this, and you do that, and you do that.” He further details his perspective:

They know how to grow coffee sustainably. . . . a lot of them are indigenous and they have a traditional heritage of growing in a natural environment. It’s only when they’re sort of forced into situations where they’re *told* to change the way that they’re growing and to develop sort of modern, mechanical methods of producing agriculture that’s when they really ran into problems because they got tied into credit and it’s just a vicious cycle. Borrow money to buy chemicals, chop down your trees, can’t really grow many other things other than coffee or a single mono-agricultural crop and the price fluctuates on the product so maybe you’ll make . . . enough money to pay back your lender, right? Maybe you don’t. If you don’t you lose your farm. So, we’re not trying to impose anything on the farmer. . . . we’re *just paying them better and we expect better quality*. (Jake)

Jake’s business provides incremental monetary gains as farmers decide to become involved in other certifications that his business is involved in. “Usually, we’re starting with a co-operative on the Fair Trade register *anyways* cause that’s an excellent place *to start*” (Jake).

Jake explains the fact that consumers are interested in seeing the FT logo (along with other certifications Jake is involved in) on their product. He states: “We just simply say [to the farmers], ‘Look, we have consumers to sell to and there’s a lot of companies out there that misrepresent their products and the only way that we can convey or build in legitimacy into what we’re selling is to go through a certification process. If you’re interested this is what we’ll pay’”:

so the motivation’s not whether they [coffee producers] care about certification per se, it’s if they’re adhering to certification and they’re using the certifiers that are considered legitimate by consumers, namely us, or North Americans, or Europeans . . . we know that we’re getting the product that we’re paying for and they get the benefit of higher wages and ultimately they get the benefit of restoring farms that have been depleted through chopping it down for the purpose of drying coffee or heating homes. (Jake)



As such, the certification process also appears to benefit the importers as well who are guaranteed that producers are following the certification criteria.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided an analysis of some of the limitations and challenges encountered and perceived by those involved with FT. Here I will summarize my key findings. I have explored and analyzed the challenges that those involved with FT face in the context of capitalism. As highlighted in **Ch. Two**, the operation of FT within capitalism presents many challenges. I argue that FT cannot dramatically expand within capitalism because this system of social organization is structured in such a way as to ensure the existence of “economic inequality” (Saad-Filho 2003a:21). Jeremy emphasizes his point that FT is not capable of “transforming the global economy” and encourages us to be “realistic” about FT’s role. I argue that FT is an “effort” that should not be brushed aside. It represents an extremely important component of the struggle toward a more just organization of global society. FT, on its own, does not and will not dramatically alter the structure of the capitalist marketplace. Yet, it does provide the opportunity to participate in a more just form of production, exchange, and consumption (for those who can afford to do so and have access to the products). As well, it provides the opportunity for people to think about why FT exists, to think about why other products are not considered FT, encourage discussion and action about the expansion of FT certification standards to additional products, and contribute to the process/struggle of challenging capitalism through various means.

The exploitative and destructive organization of capitalism heavily influences the extent to which FT coffee will become a norm or remain a limited market niche. Interviewees vary in

their opinion on this, with Jeremy suggesting that it is unlikely that FT coffee will become “the norm” while some others appear to suggest the simplicity with which FT coffee could do so.

The issue of the class dimension of the FT movement and cost-sensitive consumers reveals that some interviewees believe that the cost of the products creates a challenge for people from the low-income sector. However, while some interviewees simply suggest that this is an unfortunate reality, one interviewee suggests that, while it is important to recognize some people’s inability to afford FT products, it is necessary to realize that this is *not* because FT products are too expensive but, rather, because the Northern consumers are economically marginalized and should also be provided with the opportunity to participate in the economy. Other interviewees are not convinced that FT products are more expensive (or suggest that they have a very small price differential).

Of great necessity to the maintenance and success of FT business and non-profit organizations is investment and funding, which presents an obvious challenge.

One of main challenges faced by those involved with FT is the limited availability of FT products. Some interviewees are involved in strategies aimed at addressing this issue.

The issue of where and how to expand the Fair Trade market and movement as it relates to allies and motives, was a theme with some interviewees. Some want FT products to be readily available in large chain stores, while others would prefer that local independent businesses are the ones who sell FT products. However, there was not a clear-cut dichotomy on this issue. For instance, some interviewees are interested in the success of independent business, yet note the importance of increased sales, regardless of location, in order for coffee producers to receive the most benefits possible, effectively causing them to partially (not wholeheartedly) support the sales of FT products in large chains.

I argue that is important to attempt to incorporate powerful coffee retail chains into the FT market while being cautious about their motives and practices, ensuring monitoring of their use of the logo, and pressuring them to switch to FT entirely. For instance, in November 2005, McDonald's began selling *exclusively* FT certified coffee in 658 outlets in New England and Albany, New York (Oxfam America 2005). Although, there are numerous reasons as to why McDonald's cannot be considered an ethical corporate business, I argue that it is definitely beneficial for FT producers that they have begun to sell FT coffee. Of key interest is McDonald's decision to sell exclusively FT coffee, instead of the traditional response of retail chains in the coffee industry who, when they decide to offer FT coffee only offer it as an option (e.g. Starbucks). Nonetheless, McDonald's has *limited* its FT coffee offerings to only 658 of its global outlets. The argument about motives, monitoring, and pressure to switch to all-FT is applicable to any business involved in the sale of FT products. Yet, the main point here is to argue that powerful coffee retail chains are the largest sellers of coffee on a quantitative basis because they have franchises. Within capitalism, while the strategic business success of many large chain stores (and of course many other independent and local businesses, as well) often excludes a social justice focus (i.e. profit before any other considerations), I argue that it is important to encourage any business to make the switch or begin to offer the choice of FT. As Simon states: "there's still a certain . . . amount of profit margin in it [selling FT coffee]. It's not like anybody's gonna lose their shirts. The only people losing their shirts are the *pickers and the growers* for *God's sake*. It's not the people marketing the stuff up here. It's like how much greed is enough?"

The issue of governing the use of "Fair Trade" phrase and use of the FT logo has many implications for the continued success of the movement. At present, the "Fair Trade"

phrase is not legislated which effectively means that anybody can use it and those involved in selling products that are not certified creates a challenge for newcomers to the movement who are confronted with a variety of labels and messages. Some interviewees are actively engaged in discussions about how to effectively deal with this issue. While lack of trust in the FT certification process on the part of consumers is possible, I argue that in order to prevent such loss of credibility, it is important for people to look for the trademarked FT logo *if* they are interested in supporting FT certified products as opposed to urging TransFair to “get control” of the entire Canadian market involvement in FT which I argue detracts from the movement.

Issues of trademarking and “ownership” of language and phrases are part of a broader issue and are not specific to Fair Trade. Numerous businesses trademark phrases as a marketing strategy.<sup>43</sup> I argue that claiming ownership over a phrase is an infringement on free speech. I believe that trademarking or “owning” the Fair Trade *phrase* is problematic, while I believe the trademarked *logo* is an important component of FT certification. I argue that education, awareness-raising and discussion about the complications of these issues is a productive approach to enabling people to understand the *distinction between* FT certified and non-certified products. It is important to distinguish between the two, but I argue that TransFair, a non-profit, should *not* have to spend time phoning businesses who are misusing the logo (perhaps misuse of the logo by businesses can be counteracted if customers check with TransFair to see if a particular business is a licensee or retailer). While it is certain that businesses are capable of presenting a false image to customers, (indeed this is why FT is so important because it attempts to make the production process transparent and democratic), I believe it is a step in the wrong direction for the FT movement to focus energy and limited resources on seeking out “cheaters.”

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<sup>43</sup> One example is Maxwell House’s (2006) trademarked tagline: “Good to the Last Drop®.”

As argued, it *is* important to distinguish certified from non-certified FT products. For consumers who are new to the idea of FT products, the usage of the term FT by those who are unaffiliated with the certification process may cause damage to the movement if people believe they are actually purchasing a certified FT product. It is important that sellers are careful to distinguish between certified and non-certified products (as interviewees do) and that consumers are cognizant of the fact that this challenge exists in the movement. While governance and owning of the Fair Trade phrase is problematic from my perspective, I argue that the accompaniment of the phrase with the word “certified”, as some people involved in FT utilize, *is* a good strategy for making the distinction. (However, as pointed out by Jim, some people even say that they are selling “Fair Trade certified” products when in fact they are not).

Some interviewees are engaged in the sale of various forms of ‘fair’ products and as such, are adamant that FT is part of something broader and some do not believe that it is the only worthwhile form of trade. Also, some interviewees use the terminology of sustainability in their discussions of FT, with some arguing that FT is one aspect of a broad notion of sustainability, others suggesting that FT includes sustainability.

One of the most challenging components of the movement from my perspective is competition from other “ethical” certification initiatives. Interviewees vary in terms of their perspectives and experiences with some very supportive of additional labels and certifications. Some interviewees see particular organizations as complementary, while others see them as a superior alternative. I argue that the FT system is vastly superior to the RA and Utz Kapeh in terms of standards as it relates to social justice for producers. While I believe that many of the environmental aims of the RA are commendable, I argue that it is best when organizations such

as the RA and FT work together as opposed to competing with each other. As well, FT certification *itself* encourages sustainable environmental practices and many FT products are certified organic as well. I argue that while there are many ethical initiatives that do not meet the social standards outlined by FLO, this does not deny the fact that other forms of trade may provide benefits for those involved and satisfy all parties. For instance, the coffee highlighted above by Martyn as one to avoid may well be an indication that there are certain aspects of FT certification that could be improved. Certainly, in terms of the financial aspect, the producers were receiving more than the FT floor price, so that is one indication that this may be a better deal for producers, who are, after all, are the supposed primary beneficiaries of such trade. Two interviewees voiced their opinion that it is beneficial to keep the packaging and marketing “simple” and accessible as opposed to marketing a wide range of certifications.

Two interviewees spoke at length about their efforts with unsatisfactory results as it relates to FT involvement and refer to such issues as the detailed forms which leaves them feeling that TransFair does not trust them, their dissatisfaction that TransFair does not take on a more active role of monitoring the use of the phrase and logo in order to catch people who are cheating, and the feeling that the fees they pay are not being used as they had hoped. While ensuring an honest process is absolutely a large part of FT certification, I argue that TransFair’s concerns as it relates to detailed report questions have less to do with trust, than with TransFair wanting to have detailed information about FT coffee sales. In fact, I think it is a really *valid* question that Jim and Donna have to provide details about whether the FT coffee was sold *as* FT coffee or was sold “under a different name.” From my perspective, in order to enhance awareness about FT it is extremely important for consumers to actually know that they are purchasing a FT cup of coffee. As well, their concern about ensuring that customers know which

coffees are FT and which are not seems to contradict the following: “here’s where it went into a blend, and ended up not going out as a Trans Fair certified thing.”

I argue that if TransFair is to continue to exist, they *need* to pay the staff and I think that it is perfectly acceptable if a large portion of money goes towards this. As well, TransFair Canada is involved in a variety of projects and initiatives as it relates to promotion and awareness-raising of FT.

The success of the FT movement is greatly impacted by marketing initiatives and educational efforts. The promotion of *both* the high quality *and* the FT component of the product appears to be the most beneficial approach for the expansion of FT because it encourages people to try FT products who otherwise may not do so if they perceive they are of an inferior quality. Education is key to increasing awareness of FT and encouraging people to become involved in the movement. However, I argue that some interviewees’ emphasis on the exceptional quality of the coffee is an aspect that has both benefits and limitations for FT and has the potential to both detract from as well as support and strengthen the movement. When consumers are encouraged to purchase a product, such as coffee, based on the quality of the taste this has the potential for FT coffee to fall into the realm of ‘just another product’ that is advertised as better-tasting. Most coffee companies (in fact most food-based advertising) have a similar strategy in terms of attracting consumers to their product based on taste. FT coffee sellers that I spoke with noted that various formats for coffee preparation which include such things as: fresh roasting, micro-roasting, and roast dating surpass the taste of any form of coffee that is produced by corporate coffee producers. Exclusive focus on quality of the taste is a limitation of the very important *educational component* of the FT movement. However, if people do end up supporting FT coffee because they enjoy the quality and *even if* they continue

to support it for this reason only, coffee producers benefit. And indeed, *that* is the whole point of FT. As such, the more people who buy FT coffee, the more the market will expand and the more benefits that will be accrued by those involved.<sup>44</sup> However, I do argue that it is extremely important, in terms of inviting new people to participate in FT, to counteract the misconception that FT products are of a lower quality in general. As such, I argue that the *combination* of a focus on quality of the FT product and the social justice components of FT is the best approach in order to move towards an encouragement about the conditions of production about other products besides a particular individual commodity such as coffee.

Some interviewees are focused more on providing information as opposed to education—two distinct activities—yet, there does not appear to be a clear-cut dichotomy. This is interesting as it relates to the implications for FT; while information about FT is educational, engaged discussion, educational efforts, awareness-raising, films, and organized activities to a large extent will determine the success of the FT movement as it relates to encouraging new people to become involved. Information *on its own*, as in a brochure located in a coffee shop, but not given to consumers, *may not* prove to be very effective in advancing and promoting FT, if the consumer does not notice the brochure, for instance, in contrast to more engaged educational activities. Some interviewees are actively involved in educational activities, while others are not.

Issues arose with some interviewees in relation to whether FT is considered an imposed structure on Southern producers with some interviewees suggesting that FT is akin to the North determining how the South should act—“again.” As an importer, Jake explains that he sees his

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<sup>44</sup> The issue of geography raises important questions about who benefits from FT. It is clear that this would not be the case for all producers as some tastes/types of coffee (coffee taste largely depends on geography, in terms of the particular place in the world where the coffee is grown) may be preferred by consumers more than others. I do not explore this issue in depth but I think it is an extremely pertinent issue. I like the taste of certain varieties and choose them over others. As noted in Ch. Two, of the three co-operatives who are able to sell all of their coffee through FT markets, two are in Mexico and the other is in Guatemala. I suggest that perhaps one of the main reasons for their success is because people prefer the taste of this coffee.



role in encouraging farms to become FT certified, not as imposition, but rather as a necessary certification process in order to appease the desire for Northern consumers to believe that the process is legitimate. As well, Jeremy emphasizes that FLO's contracts are beneficial so long as everyone is comfortable.

**Chapter Five** considers issues related to how involvement with FT influences how people think about other products that they purchase. I describe and analyze such issues as the non-influence of FT on participants' thought processes and purchasing decisions; FT as a factor that influences how people think about and act in regards to the products that they purchase; Wal-Mart and; issues related to 'fairness' in the North (i.e. local production and consumption).

## Chapter Five: Fair Trade & Socially Conscious Consumption

People build their identity, beliefs, and values through a variety of experiences, circumstances, and influences which often contribute to how they act as a consumer. Typically, many factors influence why people buy what they buy and where they buy it. Part of my research was to determine whether involvement with FT affects how people think about the act of consumption (i.e. purchase of products). This chapter addresses my third research question: Does involvement with Fair Trade influence how people think about other products that they purchase? If so, how and in what way(s)? This question is related to my belief, developed through reading the work of Hudson and Hudson (2003, 2004) as discussed above, that FT products and the FT movement can possibly act as a starting point for a more inclusive and broader critique of the organization of the global economy. This question is also related to my interest in finding out whether people see FT products as 'just another product', albeit an ethical one, or whether involvement with it encourages them to become involved and interested in challenging the process of production, consumption, and exchange of some of the other products available. (I also briefly highlight various socially conscious consumption habits interviewees are involved in [as it arose in interviews]; habits which were not influenced by involvement with FT but are the result of other influences.)<sup>45</sup> Many interviewees referred to the theme of disconnection from who actually makes products, where they are made, and the conditions of production.

This chapter proceeds with a discussion of the following issues: the non-influence of FT; FT as an influential factor; Wal-Mart and; beyond FT for the South (i.e. local production and consumption)

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<sup>45</sup> When researching this component issues surfaced in regards to correlation and causation as discussed in the methodology chapter.

The issue of whether involvement with FT influences how people think about other products that they purchase varies for interviewees. However, there *are* some similarities. Involvement with FT does not appear to impact the thought process or purchasing habits for *five* interviewees (i.e. Jasmine, Ricki, Donna, Jim, Haley). However, there are variations within this generalization. For Jasmine and Ricki, engagement with FT as sellers does not impact their thought process or purchasing habits in relation to personal consumption or other business decisions, apart from the fact that they are in the process of selling FT tea along with coffee. In the case of Donna and Jim, involvement with FT as a seller does not seem to be a determining/influencing factor *per se* because it is a “subset” of a broader perspective as it relates to “fairly traded.” However, in contrast to Ricki and Jasmine, Donna and Jim carry their personal perspective on the deep importance of “fairly traded” exchanges into both their professional and personal lives. Haley is quite new to FT and while she is interested in expanding her business to include more FT products and partaking in personal consumption of FT products outside of her business, she did not suggest that FT had influenced thinking about products other than FT products.

Involvement with FT *does* influence the thought process and purchasing habits for *four* interviewees (Martyn, Jeremy, Simon, and Jake). However, again, there are particularities that affect this generalization. Martyn, Jeremy, and Simon suggest that FT has influenced their purchasing decisions and thought process, including FT products and others. However, while FT has allowed Jeremy to nuance his understanding, he was involved in promoting “fair trade” prior to the existence of the formal FT certification process and emphasizes the simultaneity of the evolution of his purchasing habits. In his personal consumption, Jake always buys the FT option of available products. He plans to sell some other FT products, but is primarily interested

in the coffee industry, as opposed to becoming a FT retailer. However, my analysis suggests that for Jake, FT, in specific, appears to be less of an influencing factor in terms of a critique of the process of production, consumption, and exchange, than does his broad interest in sustainability, the environment, and fair trade as a general concept, which is similar to Donna and Jim. However, Donna and Jim appear to be much less concerned about the purchase of FT products outside of their business than Jake is.

### **Fair Trade: Not an Influence**

For two interviewees (Jasmine and Ricki) engagement with FT as sellers does not impact their thought process or purchasing habits in relation to personal consumption or other business decisions. Neither of them purchases FT products in their personal consumption. One aspect of the FT movement that I presently see as a minor limitation is that not everybody uses the products that are presently available as certified FT so they cannot participate as a consumer if they do not eat sugar, cocoa, and hot chocolate (as in Ricki's case). Jasmine does not eat chocolate and consumes "very little sugar" (not FT). Jasmine said she has not "seen Fair Trade bananas."

Jasmine identifies herself as a "die-hard environmentalist" who is involved in environmentally conscious purchasing habits: "We buy a lot of organic. We buy a lot of local produce. We try and buy in-season." However, such purchasing decisions are unrelated to her involvement with FT as she explained that she was practicing these shopping habits prior to involvement with Fair Trade: "As a consumer it [Fair Trade] makes absolutely no difference to me. On a personal level I still don't really like the taste of many (laugh) of the Fair Trade coffees." While unrelated to FT, Jasmine refers to the importance of protecting the rainforest,

composting, the fact that she eats very little meat, and her interest in supporting independent business.

While Ricki enjoys the taste of the high quality FT coffee that he sells and “predominantly” drinks it he does not drink very much coffee. He said that he “doubts” that he would go across the city to buy a FT banana but, if easily available, and he knows “who benefits” he would “think very hard” about whether to purchase it. Ricki notes that “the availability’s very limited . . . when I go grocery shopping there aren’t that many Fair Trade products.” He further emphasized that he is “not a great example” of a consumer because he does not “buy tons of stuff” but he does like to support independent businesses. He is not a customer of FT products as a personal consumer: “there’s an awareness. . . . translating that into personal habits, try to support independent businesses.” Ricki also brought up the issue of sweatshops but said that it was “too difficult”:

Very, very difficult to *know* and keep track and . . . I’m gonna buy a pair of shoes that I’m gonna wear all day. They still have to be comfortable and if you put that all together would that be more of an incentive for me to buy it? Yeah. . . . am I drawn in a certain way? No, it’s too hard, . . . there isn’t that much out there from what I see.

He further commented that he is interested in having information on who is benefiting when he considers purchasing a FT product.

I’m aware of the [FT] organization already. So, I’m confident enough with having a knowledge about the organization and what it does but if you take a look at the labels on the coffee that I have out there you’re actually gonna read about the farmers which co-op, which farmer is actually gonna benefit from it. And for me that’s less esoteric. Much more concrete. Much more tangible.

Ricki claims it is important to have concrete information about exactly who is benefiting from his purchase. It seems to me, however, that one can find out such information by simply finding out more information about the particular FT co-op that sells and produces a particular certified product, such as a banana. As well, Ricki’s perspective that tea farmers are not in

need of a better deal indicates that he does not expand his interest in FT coffee to other products. However, the following statement contradicts the fact that he is involved with ETP tea and will offer FT tea: "I'm not that well versed in what it's [tea] like . . . I know there's some [FT tea] available, not a huge amount. I'm not sure whether the tea farmers are in the same predicament as the coffee farmers. And tea farmers are not that widespread cause tea's only grown in far fewer countries."

When I asked Jim and Donna how involvement with FT influences how they think about other products that they purchase, they explicitly indicated that the way I had framed the question was problematic: "I'd say that we came at it the other way around, I think we mentioned last time that what we're interested in is having relationships with our suppliers and that's true as consumers as well, as a business consumer and as a personal consumer." Donna pointed out that FT "is a subset of the overall philosophy" they have: "to us the primary characteristic is organic as opposed to Fair Trade so that narrows our choices significantly and then I can only get it from wherever I can get it and it has to be near enough by." They stated that they have "a fairly specific way that we try and buy things": "We like to deal as local as we can, first. . . .with other small companies as much as possible. . . . we like it to be organic. And if it's not organic then at least if it's somewhat less damaging to the world, that's good. And we continually are revising what we're buying." In a later discussion Donna noted that they like to purchase products that have been "as fairly traded as possible." So, while the concept of "fairly traded", personally defined, and the focus for the business motive is carried into personal consumption, the purchase of FT certified products is not a primary concern because organic is the main criteria. When shopping she considers "organic and quality first"; second, purchasing something from someone with which she has a "relationship" and lastly, "Fair Trade certification." Jim said he would buy

FT bananas if he could get them and buys organic bananas when he can. In terms of sugar, they buy organic but not FT. Also, Jim says that the easily available FT products are basically coffee and chocolate and he can get those at his shop. In relation to organic sugar, Donna explains that they purchase it from:

a well-known ethical business so I'm not imagining that they are raping and pillaging for the organic sugar . . . I'm relying on my perception of their ethics to deliver fairly traded organic sugar. And also organic does tend to go with fairly traded because the certification does command a certain price in the market so typically that's a way for people to get more money for their product – to get the organic certification . . . you don't get as much exploitation in the organic crops and foods and whatnot as you do in the others. (Donna)

Donna and Jim refer to the major problems with the “anonymous” market that disconnects people from each other with the result being that people do not know who made the products and under what conditions. However, while I have analyzed Donna and Jim's perspective as one that does not appear to imply that FT influences how they think about other products, the following statement suggests that they do believe that FT raises awareness of the disconnect between producers and consumers:

it's so easy to buy the cheapest stuff that there is . . . cause we are so disconnected and the Fair Trade program is helping people at least to learn a little bit about that . . . I think they could do more, but it's all part of it, right. And we here in this rich country, in this *very rich* country should be thinking about where we're spending our dollars, how they're being used and we don't at all.

I asked Haley how she feels when she buys non-FT products such as produce at the grocery store and whether she wishes it was FT. She indicated that there are likely no problems when the vegetables are grown in Canada<sup>46</sup>, but perhaps there are related issues with fruit

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<sup>46</sup> This point is related to Jasmine's point about labour in Canada: “the cost of labour in Canada isn't like the cost of labour down in Mexico is it? (laugh) We couldn't afford coffee if it grew up here.” Neither of these comments highlight migrant labour in Canada, as does Martyn and Jeremy.

coming from Central America and bananas from Costa Rica which will “make [her] think about it”, however, when I inquire further she explains:

I don’t totally have the information of where these things are coming from or what’s happenin’ with them or what’s the story behind it. . . . I’m not really *that* familiar with fruit plantations because I haven’t really seen them like [Central American country where she was born] is not really a big supporter of that. But, I’m just hoping that the same thing that happens with coffee is not really happening with these other fruits and vegetables. I just don’t have much information about it. I don’t know where it’s coming from or how it’s traded or whether it’s fairly traded or not. (Haley)

Later, when I asked Haley the research question she explained her interest in seeing an “aisle” for FT products, (i.e. increased availability) and her interest in FT sugar and tea.<sup>47</sup>

### **Fair Trade: An Influential Factor**

In the second interview with Martyn, in an attempt to approach the topic of how involvement with FT influences thinking about other products, I asked:

at the end of the interview last time we had talked about how you had become involved in these things like Fair Trade and vegetarianism, and sweat-free clothing and you talked about your social . . . consciousness and I was just interested in whether there was one issue that started the ball rolling, or was it Fair Trade first, or was there other--?

Martyn responded: “Oh, I think it was Fair Trade first, yeah clearly. A realization that this was a really good way of doing -- helping people . . . better than donating money, if you buy Fair Trade products you’re actually helping people.” He is referring to the fact that it was FT that encouraged him to be “more *actively* interested as a volunteer, not anything else.” Martyn was “vegetarian before” he became involved with FT and he suggests that it:

is more for ethical reasons, just don’t agree with killing animals. The Fair Trade issue came later, much later. The sweatshop *also* is something that I’ve become aware of *after* I became aware of Fair Trade. So, it’s been a hugely eye-opening experience. . . . my training is in [unrelated field of work/expertise], so I don’t necessarily know all the issues about international trade

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<sup>47</sup> It occurred to me after the interview that Haley may not have interpreted the question in the way that I was asking it.



so economy and how economy in the world works is something that I was not aware of – oblivious to, and I am now aware of why people are poor and it has a lot to do with trade.

Martyn referred to the exploitative conditions for workers on banana plantations and noted that if we witnessed such conditions “we’d come back and probably never eat another banana”, and similarly highlighted the exploitative conditions for cut-flower workers in Latin America. He also suggests that if “all the meat eating people in this [name of place] went to slaughterhouses and [saw] how the animals are raised I think half of them would be vegetarians.” Martyn states: “now I know about Fair Trade, I know what’s right . . . for other things as well. Social justice of social consciousness . . . It’s expanding to other areas . . . if I could buy fair sweat-free clothes I would. If I could buy shoes and stuff that are all non-leather for example, I would but it’s hard to do it. So, that’s just me. . . . lots of work to do.”

Martyn talked about issues related to sweatshops in China, for instance, and referred to activist work done by the Maquila Solidarity Network. He highlighted problems with workers not receiving adequate wages and he noted that “this happens for almost everything you buy, you take a T-shirt, where’s it from? Made in China, made in India, made in Bangladesh.” He noted that perhaps there will be “certified Fair Trade T-shirts if you can standardize a T-shirt and make sure that it’s, the workers are getting a fair price.” But he also noted that there are problems when attempting to standardize and certify various handicraft products as fair trade, and clothing items. “[A] lot of people sell fair trade handicrafts . . . I mean handicrafts’ a different animal cause there’s no certification system as such for a hat, or gloves, or toques, how do you certify, how do you put a . . . guaranteed price on a hat. It’s made by different people, different parts of the world . . . there’s an infinite variety of different hats so I don’t think you’ll ever see a fair trade price for some of these handicrafts.” He suggests that the International Federation of Alternative Trade (IFAT), to which Ten Thousand Villages stores belong “follow fairly I think

ethical process of buying fair trade handicrafts from co-operatives” and Martyn purchases products from this store. However, he also noted the importance of supporting Native Indians in Canada by buying their *local* products: “I think most of those [Native Indian] products are also fair trade. I don’t know for sure but I think they’re made by Natives here they need -- they deserve fair trade as well. So, fair trade is not just for people in developing countries it’s for people here.” He also refers to corporate concentration of vineyards and migrant workers:

big vineyards are being bought out and the vineyards are getting bigger and bigger. So, are the workers getting a fair deal? There’s a lot of controversy over migrant workers from Mexico. They’re getting a *rotten deal*. There’s a lot of work by the Maquila Solidarity Network trying to expose . . . the working conditions of these workers. They are not being paid minimum wage because the argument is they are giving them board and lodge but their board and lodge is pretty poor and they are working tons of hours. We have that problem *here* unfair . . . working conditions here. So, I’d like to see that expanded too.

Jeremy’s socially conscious consumption was a simultaneous process that occurred over a number of years and FT played a role in the development of his practice and identity. Jeremy notes the various influencing factors in his purchasing decisions: “I think it was simultaneous because . . . it’s been for about 17 years and there wasn’t really a formal Fair Trade . . . but I still . . . was interested in the origin of the products that I bought . . . but Fair Trade has enabled me to further understand it and it’s also given me a structure within which I can make those choices for some products.” As a consumer, Jeremy explained that “when possible and available” FT products are his “first choice” but that “convenience is part of life” and sometimes it is not always possible to purchase the FT option, when traveling, for instance. As for FT products such as chocolate, cocoa, and sugar he states: “I don’t really buy a lot of that stuff, but, . . . I would pick that if I was gonna buy something. I’d pick the Fair Trade over the conventional.”

Jeremy talks about the downsides of not knowing who made his clothes and produced his food unless he goes to the farmers’ market or has access to ethical product choices, which he is

extremely supportive of. He also likes to support independent local stores and credit unions. He also talks about the benefits of a face-to-face relationship and the immense problems of presently being “disconnected”:

modernity has really disconnected people from the products that they buy so all the clothes that I’m wearing right now, I don’t have a clue who made them or where. The food that I eat, no idea who grew it, unless I go to the farmers’ market and buy it and meet the farmer, kind of thing. And so with coffee and this whole Fair Trade movement – it’s an opportunity for – to get people to reconnect to the products that they buy and that – what that does is it creates a place where you can actually have a human connection that would lead to a moral or ethical bond because it’s hard to screw somebody that you *know*, and you know has kids and that you know has dirty water because all of a sudden it’s like, “Well, geez, I’m gonna pay the extra three bucks a pound” and though that co-op is gonna sink a well in that village in the next three years and those kids are gonna have clean water to drink and they won’t have to drink from the stream anymore. So that’s part of the idea is to connect people.

Jeremy appears to attribute more success to FT certification, in specific, in challenging the notion of disconnect, than Jim and Donna. Jeremy hopes that when people buy FT coffee from him it will encourage them to think about other purchases that they make once they realize the costs of production that go into a particular commodity and all of the people who need to be paid in that process. He highlights that “it’s an exercise in economic valuation that we engage in when we talk about Fair Trade too we’re actually talking to consumers about this is the value, this is how much it costs, this is our end of it and people begin to understand economics and hopefully they’ll begin to question things like, ““Well, how come I get produce so cheap?”” It is certainly my hope that Fair Trade can facilitate this type of connection as well. “Fair Trade is a really good way of getting people to think about the connections that they have and so if you get them thinking about connections in one area then hopefully you get them thinking about connections in other areas too” (Jeremy). Jeremy has been influenced by FT and other related factors that contribute to his actions a consumer and in other areas of his life. This indicates that there is the potential that other people could also

be influenced by FT, more broadly in such areas, and indeed some interviewees refer explicitly to such examples (e.g. Simon and bananas, grapes; Martyn and sweatshops, etc.).

In further detailing the importance of recognizing the “true value” of what things are worth, Jeremy argues that “we can’t use the labour of people in the South to subsidize our habits anymore, or we shouldn’t be. We should be paying the true value and as a result, our standards of living might go down.” He refers to the example of purchasing a mango: “*my God, this mango has traveled like half way around the world and it’s in the supermarket and it’s fresh and I have to pay forty cents for it like this is insane I should be paying like five bucks for this mango. But the people who picked it probably got like five cents.*” He refuses to buy running shoes because of a problem with the ethical sourcing and notes the difficulties involved in this but suggests: “the easiest thing for me to do really in terms of purchases is around food, I can buy from a bakery that I know the baker. [city] has got a lot of farmers around it so I can get produce, I can get meat and chicken and stuff, eggs that are all from around here.” He further details his experience:

But in terms of *other* things like manufactured goods, my computer, whatever, it’s *really hard* and so, you do what you can . . . some people find that disempowering in that they can’t buy anything that isn’t screwin’ somebody but the flip side is that you can buy stuff that is really positive and so you should work on that and then slowly the more you do that the more we’ll be able to expand and eventually we’ll have Fair Trade T-shirts or whatever. But, we have to grow the market. And get people thinking about it. (Jeremy)

As for clothing he shops at Mark’s Work Wearhouse “because most of their clothing is made in Canada” and also likes to purchase “union products.” He explains that “sometimes the produce that we eat is harvested by migrant labour but you can’t investigate every product you buy, you’d go nuts and in Canada at least we have laws and we have minimum wages by and large . . . there are some safeguards . . . there’s a minimum standard I know is being met.” While he is “not a nationalist” he suggests it is important to purchase “a product that’s produced somewhat closer to

you where you can observe the impact [and this] should become a priority as opposed to the lowest price.” Jeremy is interested in ethical purchasing whenever possible while recognizing the inability to purchase everything ethically and noting the immense benefits to be gained by being able to have a choice in some instances: “I will probably not buy a product that I know somebody’s getting *screwed* when they’re involved in the production.” He states:

I don’t own a car but I certainly rent one every once in a while and go on buses . . . so I’m participating in the petroleum economy which is the reason why we have wars and all sorts of things like that. I mean, I can’t avoid it. What the hell am I gonna do? Walk to [country overseas]? I’m not that strong a swimmer. . . . It’s reality and some folks, say, “Well, you shouldn’t get in an airplane, you shouldn’t get in a car, and you shouldn’t do this, that and the other thing.” It’s like well, “What the fuck can I do then? What the hell? . . . have a bit of fun. Fifty percent of being human is being fun – havin’ a good time, that’s why we’re here really. We need more of that. The more fun the better. (Jeremy)

Pragmatically, Jeremy is interested in purchasing things that he *uses* as opposed to “handicrafts . . . I don’t need a basket or ten baskets. That’s why I’m interested in things like [FT] cotton for clothing.”

In Simon’s case, it was coffee “that attracted [his] attention to Fair Trade” and “out of that came all of the other issues from clothing to chocolate to . . . all other commodities that are there keeping the developing world impoverished.” He notes:

when I began to discover how these macro politics – these macro capitalist adventures, particularly with [global currency] speculation and futures trading impacted people on the ground, it began to make sense to me to move into Fair Trade, particularly Fair Trade coffee. But, there are other commodities that we use on a day to day basis that we can influence how it is that people’s lives, in fact the poorest of the world are impacted.

In relation to other purchasing decisions, Simon talked about the human rights violations in terms of products made in China (“when I look at products that I purchase that are made in China I wonder, am I supporting somebody to be exploited or is this a product that I can live within my conscience. I don’t know.”) and his interest in no-sweat clothing, and various other purchasing

decisions that he makes. He states, “Well, I’ve always maintained that until I know who made those shoes, these pants, this shirt, the gas in my tank, the car that I drive, everything that I purchase – until it is that I know those commodities, those products, those things that I utilize everyday – if I don’t know that they were fairly traded then I’ve got some work to do.” Simon emphasized the process of constantly critiquing his purchasing habits: “that kind of a stance is *part* of an ongoing transformation in my own life. It won’t end. It’s not like it’s gonna solve everything and I’m not sayin’ that other people should do what I do. It’s just what I do.” He highlights the process of thinking about what he consumes:

You have to act and how it is that we act dictates the direction of events in history as well as our own personal lives so, yeah, it will be the rest of my life that this work -- . . . as I said before, critiquing my own behavior. I don’t know whether these products were made properly [looking at his attire] or with ethical standards that didn’t exploit the workers but I’ve begun to try to be conscious every time I go out there. (Simon)

I feel compelled that we each have something important to do to change this. There is no reason that all these African nations and people growing coffee particularly in South American nations should be being *screwed* by our practices. I enjoy coffee and I see Starbucks just mushroom in the last ten years out of nowhere making billions at the expense of these people and their children. That doesn’t need to happen and I felt that if I was going to make any kind of a difference I needed to look into all those aspects my own clothing and things that I consume and so forth. (Simon)

For Simon, an involvement with FT coffee led to an interest in thinking about bananas and other issues that are inter-related to his on-going process of critique:

I see all of us in this adventure in some way connected and particularly, this one little issue, Fair Traded coffee on a day to day basis in the Northern developed capitalist economies is impacting negatively people in Southern less developed economies who are *feeding me, clothing me, the chocolate, the bananas* – bananas have been *the same price – three pounds for a buck since I was a kid in high school and that’s more decades than I want to . . . share with you back. Three pounds for a buck!* And it dawned on me when I was looking at Fair Trade coffee. Bananas are the same thing. What else is it that I’m eating in my grocery store that *I’m creating conditions of impoverishment for* the farmers, and the growers, and the pickers of these things. Like chocolate, . . . there’s a lot of wine that’s created – grapes that are grown that we consume up here that create the same conditions.

Simon is also a supporter of Ten Thousand Villages and notes that “there’s tons of hand-made crafts and stuff that we’ve begun to look at and purchase as gifts.” He also notes:

I pay attention to things like Bono [singer of band U2] -- his partner is looking at developing a line of clothing, haute couture, . . . hip clothing, . . . solely with goods produced from African sources. And *this is exciting – things could shift on a dime* with the marketplace going, “Well, God, why not?” We can’t depend on guys like George Bush and Paul Martin to do this job alone. They’re players, they’re big players, but *so are we*. So are we. So, clothing, chocolate, coffee, wine from South America.

I am certain that George Bush is not going to make any advancements to the cause of social justice and I believe Simon would likely agree as it appears his statement is in reference to a more general firm belief in the importance of citizens actively partaking in democracy by accessing powerful governmental representatives to voice their interest in various issues, such as the expansion of FT. Simon suggests that it is not enough to depend on the “well-to-do wealthy people in power” (i.e. politicians) to make decisions and maintains that citizens should partake in democracy by accessing politicians. For Simon, “it doesn’t matter . . . whether they’re [politicians] a Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, I could care less. They all are up to the same adventure. Using the money that’s collected by taxes to create some form of capitalist democracy.”

In terms of his personal consumption, Jake explains: “there’s Fair Trade teas, Fair Trade bananas, Fair Trade chocolate, or cocoa those are the only few – other products that come to mind.” He later explained, “I haven’t seen anything else certified Fair Trade other than those things.” Jake provided further information on his experience with Fair Trade:

I’m kind of myopic as far as all the other certified Fair Trade products. There’s Ten Thousand Villages and I walk into that store occasionally just to see what they’re selling but I don’t stay caught up in all the various things the Fairtrade Labelling Organization is certifying. All I care about *right now* is coffee cause . . . our focus is to have the *biggest*, positive impact and then once we’re successful we’ll turn our attention to other things. . . . we’re not about selling all the various Fair Trade and organic certified products that the world has to offer. We dilute our impact by doing so.

When I inquired as to whether Jake purchases the non-FT option of FT products if the FT option is not available he explained: "I'm not an impulse . . . shopper. If I want chocolate and it's from Nestlé or Cadbury, forget it. Plus, I don't like it." As such, he "always" purchases the FT option of available products, even if it is more costly to do so. He said, "generally don't even look at the prices." I asked Jake when he began to purchase FT products and he said, "couldn't tell you but it was after . . . we were licensed and then as the products started to appear in the stores so, I really don't know, after 1997." Jake is also immensely involved in environmental issues and likes to buy organic products. He uses the term "buy smart" and notes that this involves thinking about "[t]he countries that they're coming from, what their social and political situation is, ensuring that the product[s] that you're buying are recycled or re-used or have as little impact on the environment as possible. If it's an agricultural product that you're trying to address the issues of Fair Trade." Jake is also a purchaser of "organic cotton clothes" and prefers to shop at Mountain Equipment Co-op. He chooses not to buy products from particular countries, one of which is the "self-absorbed" United States as he does not "support their economic beliefs" and the "damage" they do (he considers Britain to be the "same"). Jake believes firmly that "people just have to take the blinders off and make *conscious purchasing decisions and they should always be political* whether it's a Fair Trade issue, whether it's an environmental issue." He noted that he does buy a product from the US if it is in line with his philosophy but chooses the Canadian product if he can get the same product made in Canada. He also does not like to purchase products from certain countries in Africa "Zimbabwe for example, leaders in power just drove out a million people in the slums of some of the major cities who he knew voted against him. Why would you support anything produced in that country?"



## Wal-Mart

Appelbaum (2005:370) points out that Wal-Mart—a single corporation—has an economic surplus almost congruent with that of an entire country: “Wal-Mart’s revenues of \$245 billion made it the world’s eighteenth largest economy, roughly tied with Switzerland.” Four participants: Simon, Jim, Donna, and Jeremy voiced their contempt with the business practices of global retail giant, Wal-Mart in the context of discussing their personal purchasing decisions. These participants were adamant that Wal-Mart’s main goal of the bottom-line with no respect for workers’ rights contributes to their decision to refrain from shopping there. These interviewees referred to such issues as low prices, exploitation of workers, and the inability of workers to unionize.

Simon explained that he refuses to shop there despite the fact that it is more costly for him not to. He explains his perspective: “They’re eating up all the competition, all the smallest people. They’re non-unionized. They do not care whether their sources are ethical or not, it’s only the lowest common denominator of a dollar that matters in their sources.” Jeremy states: “I avoid Wal-Mart.” However, in recounting an experience where he was forced to buy a necessary camping accessory that he had forgotten when traveling he explained that this is “part of the contradiction of living in a capitalist society if your values and ethics are completely the opposite of what society is moving towards.” He explains why he dislikes Wal-Mart:

there’s so many reasons to avoid Wal-Mart. Where do you start. It’s a nasty company. . . . they break unions, they buy all kinds o’ cheap crap and they have pretty nasty relationships with their suppliers they basically tell their suppliers how much they’re gonna pay for stuff and so the suppliers then have to figure out how the hell they’re gonna do that if they wanna keep their Wal-Mart contract, they’re very aggressive. (Jeremy)

While Donna and Jim do not shop at Wal-Mart they buy their organic soymilk at [name of store] which is owned by Wal-Mart because they have not been able to find it elsewhere.

They explain that this decision is forced due to having no alternative place to buy it and if they are eventually able to get the organic soy somewhere else they will stop buying it there. Donna also notes that they “are giving dollars to effectively Wal-Mart . . . but at least it’s paying Wal-Mart to do a better thing than what they usually do which is have something that’s organic.”

Donna detailed her dislike of Wal-Mart’s low prices and exploitation:

I want him [employee] to do a video with a sad face [as opposed to Wal-Mart’s happy face] showing how that’s done [falling prices]. And *how it’s done* is they go out to often Third World countries or China or wherever it is and they place an enormous order on them that requires *one hundred percent of their production* so they end up losing all of their other customers and now they’re entirely dependent on Wal-Mart and then Wal-Mart goes back and says, “That was nice, now do it for half the money.” And this is how that happy face is out there dancing around like what’s happening is really, really great. (Donna)

While Jasmine also singled out Wal-Mart as a business where she “very rarely shop[s]”, she noted: “Wal-Mart’s just sort of the tip of the iceberg, isn’t it? Everybody likes to pick on Wal-Mart.” Jasmine explains that she personally chooses to “support local independent business *as much as I possibly can*” as opposed to chain stores and that Wal-Mart is just one example of “anybody who can sell for next-to-nothing and under cut everybody else and harms everybody else, it’s like price cutting.” Unlike other participants noted above, Jasmine points out that Wal-Mart “*give[s] back hugely into the community* in all kinds of programs.”

Wal-Mart most definitely possesses a great deal of power in the global economy. “Among retailers, the United States dominates the world, and Wal-Mart dominates the United States” (Appelbaum 2005:370). As well, they have a very bad record in terms of ethical production standards, as indicated by their designation as ““Sweatshop Retailer of the Year”” by the Maquila Solidarity Network (2003); clearly not a positive award.

## **Beyond Fair Trade for the South: Local Production and Consumption**

Six interviewees (Jake, Jasmine, Donna, Jim, Martyn, and Jeremy) refer to the importance of supporting local farmers, and some link this to a preference for organic produce. As noted above, Hudson and Hudson (2004:142) point out that “[o]ne could envision a role for fair trade in facilitating a broader process of economic transformation (toward local production for local need, for example), but this represents potential, rather than current practice.” In the context of their case study of FT coffee in Chiapas, it appears that the authors are referring to local production in terms of the producing countries involved in FT, as opposed to an *international* system of trade which privileges local production combined with local consumption. However, in line with the focus of local production and consumption, many interviewees highlighted the importance of focusing on consuming locally produced products. All interviewees acknowledge that FT is a system designed for trade between North and South. Jasmine argues that if people are interested in helping farmers in Canada they should go the farmers’ market and buy organic, in-season produce and Jeremy is interested in supporting the farmers’ market. Jake and Martyn believe that trade should happen after local needs are satisfied. Donna and Jim refer to their interest in local products and also their interest in (but difficulty in accessing) locally raised “beef.”

Martyn emphasizes the importance of buying local and suggests: “it’s not a specifically a Fair Trade mandate, but . . . people who talk about Fair Trade are often involved in local initiatives in terms of the local community.” While Martyn believes that supporting “local producers” is unrelated to FT certification, he suggests “it’s simply fair – a fair deal.” He suggests that it is unlikely that produce grown by local Canadian farmers “will ever be Fair Trade certified” and while he does not suggest that they should be, he points out that the

problems in the South in regards to producers “being forced to reduce prices because of market pressure [from large chains] is *exactly* what we have here for local producers.” He explains that many local farmers are “struggling to get a fair price. They are competing against agri-business. It’d be nice to see fair prices for tomatoes and cucumbers from small-scale farmers.” Martyn believes that:

Trade should happen only when . . . you’ve satisfied your own local needs. When you start saying, “Oh, I can produce more and sell you more,” you’re gonna just destroy some other poor farmer in another community. Trade should come *after* local consumption or after your local needs are met, but that’s how trade started out many thousands of years ago, but it’s not that any more, it’s become dehumanized.

Jake states that “eventually hopefully we’ll see more fair trade with *our* farmers.” He suggests that mono-crop agriculture is not a “smart” activity as it destroys the environment in the long run. He is interested in communities growing a diversity of crops to be consumed locally. For instance, he dislikes “buying apples from Chile in Canada when we grow so many apples ourselves, doesn’t seem to make much sense.” Jake explains that his interests are not “confined” to coffee and the countries from which they source their coffee and that he considers the fact that other “agricultural industries that need some help. Could benefit from sustainability.” As it relates to his interest in local production and consumption and a better existence for farmers in Canada he states:

*we’re* trying to help farmers in different countries when farmers in *our own country* are suffering. *Why* are you growing thousands of acres of one type of crop in areas? And why is that crop so subject to commodity fluctuations where one year the farmer makes money, the next year they lose money? I kind of like the whole idea where the super farm just simply disappears for a lot of product and a lot of food and produce is grown locally for local consumption. Cause it re-breathes life back into towns that used to be agricultural-based and . . . with super farms all around them . . . no livelihood. No people with enough money to be supporting a drug store, or a post office, or a restaurant, coffee shop.

This section has briefly discussed some interviewees' interest in the issue of production, consumption, and exchange of products as it relates to the local community, which is associated with issues of relationships between producers and consumers, sustainability, and fairness.

## **Chapter Summary**

As indicated in the **Introduction**, a component of this research was to explore how the FT movement and its affiliated consumable products may encourage positive social change as FT provides people with the opportunity to question why such an alternative (to Free Trade) exists and to think about the conditions of production and processes of trade of other products. If consumers, sellers, advocates, and activists involved with FT also question why other commodities are not produced in a socially just manner, the FT movement offers the potential to foster a discussion (and hopefully action) about changing such injustices. As Hudson and Hudson (2003:427) state, "the information and the education provided through alternative trade needs to use the product as a gateway to exploring all of the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of production and consumption." As such, this chapter considered issues related to how or whether involvement with FT influences how people think about other products that they purchase. I described and analyzed the fact that FT does not appear to influence the thought processes and purchasing decisions of five interviewees.

While the interpretation of organic certification by Jim and Donna represents a form of "fairly traded", I argue that a "fair" deal for workers is typically irrelevant to organic certification as many people own plantations that, while organic, may not pay employees a fair wage. Organic certification has absolutely *nothing* to do with the co-operative, democratic, transparent structure of producer groups which is guaranteed by FT certification. So, while organic certification is largely beneficial as it relates to the ability for workers to work in an environment

devoid of harmful chemicals, pesticides, and fertilizers; on the other hand, it does not guarantee the ethical production and exchange standards in line with FT certification. As for the higher price gained for organic products, this financial increase may or may not reach the workers.

I then described and analyzed how FT influences how four interviewees think about and act in regards to the products that they purchase. While some interviewees are clearly involved in thinking and acting as a result of their FT involvement, this is not the case for all.

I also discussed some interviewees' poor perception of Wal-Mart as an unjust corporation. I then discussed the issue of local production and consumption as it relates to 'fairness' which was brought up by most interviewees. This chapter also included a discussion of some of the inter-connected social justice issues, consumption choices, and thought processes that are relevant for people who are also involved in the sale and/or purchase of FT products, whether or not FT was the influencing factor behind such decisions as it indicates a consciousness and interest in various issues that arose in conversations.

In the **Conclusion** that follows, I re-iterate the key findings. I also discuss what I have learned from interviewees and suggest that I am ultimately encouraged about FT. I also discuss what this research suggests about the possibilities and limitations of social activism and social conscience in contemporary Canada.

## Conclusion

This research answers some important questions about how FT is constituted, interpreted, and experienced by some Northern sellers, consumers, activists, advocates, practitioners, and an importer. Practically, I hope that it will be useful to people interested in FT and that my findings will contribute to the discussion about how to maintain and improve various aspects of it. I argue that the expansion and continued success of FT depends on encouraging as many people as possible to participate in FT through education and awareness-raising via various means. FT works to establish a dignified livelihood for many producers in the South. A *major* determining factor of peoples' ability to thrive is rooted in the current economic structure of international trade, production, and consumption. The interconnections of these three aspects of the international capitalist system affect peoples' daily lives, keeping many people impoverished and struggling.

FT is distinctly a system of international trade based on the import of products to North America, Japan, Europe, New Zealand, and Australia from so-called "developing countries" (as FLO refers to them) in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Yet, it is important to ensure that *all* people, the world over, are given the opportunity to thrive as opposed to merely surviving. As Waridel (2002:27) succinctly notes, "[s]ustainability should be a requirement for all trade, and not merely a means for well-off, educated consumers to feel good about themselves." As highlighted by Chomsky (2000): "[a] successful Fair Trade model would be a substantial step towards a more socially just society, in which the principles of decent wages and working conditions are seen not as an 'alternative' model for business firms, but as the minimum standard for their operations."

I will re-iterate my key findings from this research. First, I will summarize the key points in regards to interviewees' perceived benefits of FT as a result of involvement with it and my analysis of these issues. Interviewees find it worthwhile to participate in FT because it allows them to feel that they are making a contribution to a better world through their daily actions, with some more engaged with it than others. Some point to the marketability of FT as a benefit of involvement. FT provides the ability for sellers to act as facilitators of social justice in their role of providing FT products to consumers and/or providing an outlet for producers to put their end product.

FT provides consumers with the ability to exercise their agency in an ethical way through the purchase of FT products and engagement with it. This provides consumers with a sense of power and control over their actions. Such actions are indeed influential in regards to the power of individuals to create social change as it relates to consumer "choice" and other political actions. Individuals can absolutely 'make a difference' but such choices are not sufficient to create a dramatic shift in the capitalist marketplace. If the goal is to move toward a society in which ethics in production, consumption, and exchange is the *standard*, consumer "choice" will not get us there *on its own*. The FT movement appears to place too much emphasis on the consumer as an agent of change and it is unrealistic to expect that FT will be either fully, extensively, or even modestly, incorporated into the practices of large corporations and many other businesses within a capitalist system. However, as I insist throughout this thesis, positive actions, even a small act (the purchase of FT coffee), should not be discredited as such acts are the building blocks to a progressive and ethical organization of society. However, it is essential to work towards *ethical standards* for production and exchange of *all* products, as opposed to providing consumer choice and I argue that it is only when a large number of people engage in



social justice activism and pressure that the organization of society can change in a dramatic and expansive way.

There is room for the FT market to expand as interviewees highlighted their interest in various product developments in this respect. The “mainstream” status of organic certification, combined with FT, indicates the connections highlighted by interviewees between the success of each of these certifications. Interviewees’ experiences vary in their reasoning for combining FT with organic. While many interviewees believe that consumers are more aware of organic than FT, this is not a consistent belief between all interviewees. Some believe that the mainstream status of organic certification provides an opportunity to expand the FT market. Some argue that consumers affiliate organics with personal health and that FT is a ‘different level’ as it expands beyond self-interest to an emphasis on solidarity with people involved in production.

All interviewees who are engaged in FT trust the certification process and its benefits for producers. However, some interviewees are engaged in additional forms of trust-building with their customers and producers.

I argue that Jeremy highlights one of the *most important* aspects of FT involvement for Northern businesses. If FT is to expand beyond a market niche and is to become more than simply another product, discussion and action related to FT must include thinking expansively about the problems with the organization of the global economy. In contrast to Jasmine’s emphasis on the variety of ways that people can ‘make a difference’, I argue that FT is one of the most important organizations to support because of its role in challenging the organization of capitalist “relations of production” (Hudson and Hudson 2003, 2004). However, some interviewees perceive requirement of co-ops for FT coffee producers as a limitation of the certification process as it prevents certain people in need from being involved. While this does

appear to be the case, I argue that the FT process is working towards a more just working situation for producers and they cannot include everybody immediately because such things take time.

FT's role in connecting consumers and producers through relationships is an extremely beneficial component of the movement as it relates to "commodity fetishism."

I have also highlighted both the co-operative and competitive aspect of FT involvement. Competition between businesses involved in the sale of FT products is largely unavoidable due to the fact that FT is a primarily a consumer movement and exists within capitalism. Ricki was deemed as a competitor by another company involved in FT coffee and according to him, this lessens the ability for the expansion and promotion of FT as a "cause." I believe it is important to challenge and discuss the competitive market aspect of FT involvement in order to reduce it and move toward eliminating capitalism, as FT cannot expand dramatically within a capitalist system. Consumers are interested in expansion and increased availability of FT products, yet this obviously creates a problem for some sellers who must vie for a competitive niche; yet, one interviewee is inclined to see the sale of FT products by other businesses as a contribution to the movement.

Some interviewees are involved in networking and connecting with other players in the movement (such as in the local community and in dialoguing with TransFair Canada) in order to contribute to a sense of solidarity, collaboration, and create further expansive achievements. The success of FT largely depends on effective dialogue and communication between all of the various actors and organizations presently involved in FT globally. Northern advocates, sellers, and consumers of FT are some of the key people that must be included in such discussions.

TransFair Canada, the non-profit organization which certifies and audits FT in Canada, is a key player in the FT movement.

The distinction between trade, aid, and charity indicates that many interviewees believe that trade is an extremely beneficial approach to assisting producers, as opposed to merely donating money, as the purchase and/or sale of FT products provides a tangible and immediate ability to create positive change.

Recognition of one's privileged social location confirms one's responsibility to participate in initiatives such as FT for some interviewees. Some interviewees highlight the benefit of the absence of child labour involved in FT.

Following are my key findings as it relates to interviewees' perceived challenges and limitations of FT as a result of involvement with it and my analysis of the issues. I have explored and analyzed the challenges that those involved with FT face in the context of capitalism. Jeremy emphasizes his point that FT is not capable of "transforming the global economy" and encourages us to be "realistic" about FT's role. I argue that FT is an "effort" that should not be brushed aside. It represents an extremely important component of the struggle toward a more just organization of global society. FT, on its own, does not and will not dramatically alter the structure of the capitalist marketplace. Yet, it does provide the opportunity to participate in a more just form of production, exchange, and consumption (for those who can afford to do so and have access to the products). As well, it provides the opportunity for people to think about why FT exists, to think about why other products are not considered FT, encourage discussion and action about the expansion of FT certification standards to additional products, and contribute to the process/struggle of challenging capitalism through various means.

The exploitative and destructive organization of capitalism heavily influences the extent to which FT coffee will become a norm or remain a limited market niche. Interviewees vary in their opinion on this, with Jeremy suggesting that it is unlikely that FT coffee will become “the norm” while some others appear to suggest the simplicity with which FT coffee could do so.

The issue of the class dimension of the FT movement and cost-sensitive consumers reveals that some interviewees believe that the cost of the products creates a challenge for people from the low-income sector. However, while some interviewees simply suggest that it this is an unfortunate reality, one interviewee suggests that, while it is important to recognize some people’s inability to afford FT products, it is necessary to realize that this is *not* because FT products are too expensive but, rather, because the Northern consumers are economically marginalized and should also be provided with the opportunity to participate in the economy. Interviewees’ perspectives vary with respect to the cost of FT products with some emphasizing that they are more expensive while some argue that price is not a particularly relevant issue.

Of great necessity to the maintenance and success of FT business and non-profit organizations is investment and funding, which presents an obvious challenge.

One of main challenges faced by those involved with FT is the limited availability of FT products. Some interviewees are involved in strategies aimed at addressing this issue.

The issue of where and how to expand the Fair Trade market and movement as it relates to allies and motives, was a theme with some interviewees. Some want FT products to be readily available in large chain stores, while others would prefer that local independent businesses are the ones who sell FT products. However, there was not a clear-cut dichotomy on this issue. For instance, some interviewees are interested the success of independent business, yet; note the importance of increased sales, regardless of location, in order for coffee producers to receive the

most benefits possible, effectively causing them to partially (not wholeheartedly) support the sales of FT products in large chains.

The issue of governing the use of “Fair Trade” phrase and use of the FT logo has many implications for the continued success of the movement. At present, the “Fair Trade” phrase is not legislated which effectively means that anybody can use it and those involved in selling products that are not certified creates a challenge for newcomers to the movement who are confronted with a variety of labels and messages. Some interviewees are actively engaged in discussions about how to effectively deal with this issue. Some interviewees are engaged in the sale of various forms of ‘fair’ products and as such, are adamant that FT is part of something broader and some do not believe that it is the only worthwhile form of trade. Also, some interviewees use the terminology of sustainability in their discussions of FT, with some arguing that FT is one aspect of a broad notion of sustainability, others suggesting that FT includes sustainability.

One of the most challenging components of the movement from my perspective is competition from other “ethical” certification initiatives. Interviewees vary in terms of their perspectives and experiences with some very supportive of additional labels and certifications. Some interviewees see particular organizations as complementary, while others see them as a superior alternative. I argue that the FT system is vastly superior to the RA and Utz Kapeh in terms of standards as it relates to social justice for producers. While I believe that many of the environmental aims of the RA are commendable, I argue that it is best when organizations such as the RA and FT work together as opposed to competing with each other. As well, FT certification *itself* encourages sustainable environmental practices and many FT products are certified organic as well.

Two interviewees spoke at length about their efforts with unsatisfactory results as it relates to FT involvement and refer to such issues as the detailed forms which leaves them feeling that TransFair does not trust them, their dissatisfaction that TransFair does not take on a more active role of monitoring the use of the phrase and logo in order to catch people who are cheating, and the feeling that the fees they pay are not being used as they had hoped.

The success of the FT movement is greatly impacted by marketing initiatives and educational efforts. The promotion of *both* the high quality *and* the FT component of the product appears to be the most beneficial approach for the expansion of FT because it encourages people to try FT products who otherwise may not do so if they perceive they are of an inferior quality. I argue that in order for the FT movement to expand, education and awareness-raising of the movement itself and FT products must be a priority. I argue that the *combination* of a focus on quality of the FT product and the social justice components of FT is the best approach in order to move towards an encouragement about the conditions of production about other products besides a particular individual commodity such as coffee.

As it relates to implications for FT, I argue that educational efforts *appear* to strengthen the movement more than the provision of information. Some interviewees are actively involved in educational activities, while others are not.

Issues arose with some interviewees in relation to whether FT is considered an imposed structure on Southern producers with some interviewees suggesting that FT is akin to the North determining how the South should act -- "again." As an importer, Jake sees his role in encouraging farms to become FT certified, not as imposition, but rather as a necessary certification process in order to appease the desire for Northern consumers to believe that the

process is legitimate. As well, Jeremy emphasizes that FLO's contracts are beneficial so long as everyone is comfortable.

My key findings as it relates to the issue of whether and how FT influences how people think about other products that they purchase are as follows: FT does not appear to influence the thought processes and purchasing decisions of five interviewees, while it does impact how four interviewees think about and act in regards to the products that they purchase. Having summarized my main findings I will conclude with a discussion of these and other issues.

The FT system is a major contributing factor to the debate and action surrounding how to continue to move toward a world in which fairness, equity, and respect is not an anomaly, for some but, rather, the mainstay for all. While such achievements will not be fully possible within a capitalist and patriarchal system, gradual reforms that move toward a more socially just organization of society, whether they provide short or long term reprieves from various forms of exploitation, are important, life-changing, and should certainly not be dismissed. The following statement by Jeremy highlights that while FT by itself cannot be expected to dramatically alter the global economy, it should be recognized for the "positive" and immediate effect it presently provides to people:

I think it's unrealistic for people to think that you can actually change the world with Fair Trade but just to understand that Fair Trade is within this continuum of change and it's a *really* interesting and positive one that affects people's lives *now*. . . . It's an actual thing that's happening that *is actually changing people's lives*.

It is essential that the FT market and movement continue to be linked, through activism, education, and research in such a way as to encourage critical reflection on the organization of international production, consumption, and exchange. As Hudson and Hudson (2004) argue, it is important to highlight that FT challenges capitalist "relations of production" in the South (and

similarly so in the North for Jeremy in terms of Northern worker co-ops that sell FT products produced in the South). If not, the FT logo may only be a fleeting product, or remain confined to certain commodities exchanged between North and South, instead of being part of a broader movement toward a more equitable organization of the world.

In line with Fraser's (2001) work, discussed above, the actions of interviewees involved in FT in the North suggests that FT is most in line with "affirmative redistribution" in that the structure of the global capitalist system remains intact, businesses sell products to willing consumers, international trade takes place across socially constructed "borders", and economic inequality is lessened as opposed to eradicated. While Jeremy's Northern FT worker co-op offers the potential for the FT movement to recognize the importance of a more democratic organization of the business community in the North, it does not appear that the FT movement will be able to accomplish this on its own. As well, profit cannot exist without exploitation and even businesses that sell exclusively FT and believe greatly in the principles, indeed, must still remain profitable by virtue of operating within capitalism. As a social justice movement, FT, as it is presently constituted in the North, and as it relates to interviews with Northern consumers, sellers, and activists, is more in line with "affirmative redistribution." Even if employees of Northern businesses are being paid a "fair" salary and if the business is a co-op (which is most definitely a much more democratic way of organizing the business); if the business is still making a profit, this is only possible by not paying people for the full value of their work (Saad-Filho 2003b). However, I am *not* arguing that continued ability to create profit means that such positive actions on the part of Northern worker co-ops is not worthwhile and beneficial. By all means, *better conditions for workers* and a *more equitable share of profit*, are absolutely important because they improve people's lives; such actions *must not be discredited* simply



because they are *limited*, in the sense that capitalism is still here and the *production* of profit continues.

Most interviewees argue that consumers have a great deal of agency and are powerful actors in the market when they choose to purchase FT products. Some interviewees suggest that consumer action can lead powerful corporations to change their ways when consumers act on and/or voice their preferences. However, while consumer choices are influential, they are not enough. We cannot simply allow business and consumer choices to take care of things. Taking part in additional strategies, such as education, any number of forms of activism, and/or research are necessary in order for the FT movement to expand its success. As well, the FT movement places too much emphasis on the consumer as an agent of change. Consuming “differently” (Johnston 2002:46) cannot solve the problem with the capitalist organization of society. While there have been some positive successes in terms of corporations deciding to sell FT, it is unrealistic to expect that FT will be either fully, extensively, or even modestly, incorporated into the practices of large corporations and many other businesses within a capitalist system. I argue that it is unrealistic to expect the marketplace to say “Why not?” and switch to FT.

Nonetheless, agency is powerful; positive actions should be celebrated; action does ‘matter.’ Certainly, my hope is that FT provides Southern producers with a sense of empowerment. As discussed above, Taylor (2005:137) suggests that FT farmers have benefited by “strengthening” their “organizational capacity.” I hope that the power gained through collective and democratic associations (e.g. co-ops) that they are involved in and their access to Northern markets enables them to continue to challenge the problems with the organization of the global economy. The issue of cash crops, in and of itself, suggests the limited potential for “transformative redistribution.” While it is difficult to imagine a world in which coffee does not

exist, it is likely that if producers were not forced to rely on the production and sale of it in order to survive within a capitalist economy, they would be interested in spending their time doing something else.

As discussed, Hudson and Hudson (2004:142) refer to FT's possible "role" in "facilitating a broader process of economic transformation." As stated previously, they appear to be referring to production in the South as it relates to FT producers. However, because they (2003:427) also argue that the "the information and the education provided through alternative trade needs to use the product as a gateway to exploring all of the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of production and consumption" this suggests that they are interested in the possibility that FT may act as agent of social change and action in a broad sense, beyond simply production in the South. They (2003:427) state: "Fair-trade coffee does have the potential to function as a counter-hegemonic discourse, although, as both we (and Johnston) have pointed out, this is far from inevitable given the demonstrated ability of capital to co-opt consumer movements." In considering these points in the context of my research I suggest that the interest of some interviewees' as it relates to such issues as the importance of reconnecting producers and consumers, a critique of exploitative businesses, the importance of environmental sustainability, the belief that producers deserve a "fair" share of profits and do not deserve to live in poverty, and an interest in democracy in the South (as well as for Northern businesses) suggests that Hudson and Hudson's (2003:422) following point appears to be true for some interviewees:

In getting people to focus their attention beyond the commodity on the social and the environmental conditions in which it was produced, alternative trade could encourage people to identify less as consumers and more as political actors—as citizens whose agency in the world ramifies through existing structures to produce specific consequences for other humans and for nature. This would foster the values of solidarity, empathy, and

complexity that Bowles finds are atrophying in a society in which commodity markets are so prevalent.

For instance, the interest of some interviewees in the connection between producers and consumers suggests that FT provides an avenue for them to participate in understanding and assisting producers. This does not appear to be the case for all interviewees (i.e. those who are not involved in activism in their personal lives). Indeed, the above statement is significant in terms of the theme of “voting with your dollar” that many interviewees identified as a political act. For interviewees involved in activism beyond simply purchasing and/or selling FT products, “values of solidarity” and “empathy” are, indeed, clearly important. Interviewees who are actively engaged in FT suggest that the possibility for social activism and social conscience in contemporary Canada is alive and well. However, we must be cautious about the extent to which such social conscience can be attributed to FT, in specific, as my research reveals that while FT is an influencing factor for some, there are other factors that influence how one acts in the world.

This research also suggests that social activism and social conscience in contemporary Canada has its limitations. Interviewees who are not actively engaged in the movement appear to be content in their role as small contributors who are ‘playing their part’ by providing FT products to demanding customers, facilitating the opportunity for consumers to take part in FT, and providing an outlet for the product of FT producers. The action of these interviewees does not expand into an embrace of movement-politics and activism, but is reliant on a more neutral role as a participant, as opposed to an engaged activist. Even one of the interviewees who is actively engaged with FT as a practitioner suggests some cautionary words about the limitations of social change in North America: “If you’re interested in . . . social revolution in North America, well, it’s not gonna happen in the short run because we really live in a counter-revolutionary time” (Jeremy). Jeremy suggests that it is extremely beneficial to consider our

place in the world and “try to figure out ways to change it from within” even though it will be impossible not to take some contradictory actions by nature of living in a capitalist society (Jeremy), which I believe highlights the fact that FT provides an opportunity for people to feel that they are able to ‘take a stand’ and ‘make a difference.’

At the end of this research, I find myself encouraged about the future progress and expansion that the FT movement and market will likely make. The devotion and enthusiasm of many interviewees suggests that FT has provided them with an outlet through which to pursue personal interests in their role as sellers, customers, and/or activists as a way to contribute to the improvement of the lives of Southern producers. The success of many interviewees’ efforts provides evidence of the possibilities for the expansion of FT. Reflecting on when he first became involved in promoting issues of fair trade about 17 years ago, Jeremy reveals: “I don’t think I knew at that point the potential of Fair Trade”, as it relates to the success it has had and how much it has expanded. Quite likely, we have yet to discover even greater achievements for FT.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **For Fair Trade Licensors/Labeling Bodies**

Following are a few suggestions for Fair Trade licensors/labeling bodies. Retailers of FT coffee face challenges in light of the fact that some businesses advertise that they sell “fair trade” coffee but they are not selling FT certified coffee. For instance, FT licensees expend time, money, and resources in order to be legitimately licensed by TransFair Canada. However, these businesses face competition from other businesses who are not participating in the FT program and, as such, may not gain the benefits (i.e. sell their product) of such honest participation in the FT program if customers (knowingly or unknowingly) buy products from businesses who are not legitimately involved in FT. As discussed, some interviewees explained that TransFair Canada neither monitors the use of the FT phrase nor the FT logo by businesses misusing the logo (not selling certified FT products). This results in some legitimate FT sellers being frustrated with the certification body for not taking on a more active role in monitoring the phrase and logo. If customers do not take responsibility for seeking out legitimate FT participants, these legitimate FT sellers then have to deal with possible repercussions (e.g. reduced sales if consumers buy from another business that appears to be selling FT, investment of time and money without satisfactory return). Related to this is the fact that if consumers become cynical of the legitimacy of the FT certification process, independent businesses that are doing legitimate FT (many selling a very large percentage of FT coffee and some selling 100%) will perhaps be forced to close if people no longer support FT. Of course, this would have major ramifications for FT producers in the South. As well, if the FT certification program was forced to end due to a lack of trust in its process by various actors, large corporate participants in FT who only offer FT coffee as a choice would not face as much of a challenge as independent businesses would face.

Large, powerful corporations could simply stop offering FT as a choice and go on with 'business-as-usual-pre-FT' and perhaps interpret FT as 'just another short-lived fad.'

These issues must be addressed. Certainly, various FT actors are involved in working toward a solution about how to deal with use of the Fair Trade phrase by those not involved in selling certified products and also misuse of the logo. I do not think that TransFair Canada should spend time and resources seeking out and (attempting) to put an end to illegitimate use of the FT logo, nor do I think it is a worthwhile effort to attempt to pass legislation which only allows those engaged in the sale of certified FT products to use the Fair Trade phrase. However, I do believe that these issues must be seriously attended to as they create challenges for consumers attempting to access certified FT products and for businesses that are legitimately taking the time to sell FT. I suggest that TransFair Canada could work to raise awareness of the importance of activists and consumers interested in legitimate certified FT products to consult TransFair Canada if they are unsure whether a business is selling certified FT products. This would address the problem of improper advertising of FT (either the phrase or logo usage) by those not involved with the FT certification process.

Second, TransFair Canada is a non-profit FT certifying organization FT who also educates the Canadian public about FT. Needless to say, they have a limited budget. Depending on the amount of financial resources available to them, I encourage them to continue to raise awareness about FT in various locales.

In addition to raising awareness about what FT constitutes, I also suggest a particular educational initiative. I advocate the importance of highlighting the inter-connections between various social inequities and injustices associated with the production, consumption, and exchange of commodities within a capitalist system. As discussed above, Hudson and Hudson's

(2003:427) work is important in this regard because of their suggestion that “the information and the education provided through alternative trade needs to use the product as a gateway to exploring all of the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of production and consumption.” I think the FT program is making great strides in this regard, in part, in terms of always expanding their product line to include additional commodities. However, I do think that their promotional material would benefit from a detailed explanation of more explicit connections. Along with TransFair, of course, I wholeheartedly encourage FT activists to educate people about such interconnections as well. If consumers, sellers, advocates, and activists involved with FT, also question why other commodities are not produced in a socially just manner, the FT movement offers the potential to foster a discussion (and hopefully action) about changing such injustices. As pointed out above, Hudson and Hudson (2003:424) maintain that:

If ... it [fair trade] is considered (and its proponents and practitioners consider it) as a single element in a broader movement to build a progressive transnational politics aimed at transforming the relations of production globally, fair trade can be understood as occupying a particularly strategic position. It has worked to establish transnational networks of solidarity between progressive political elements in the North and southern workers and is attempting to initiate a radical questioning of the dominant system of international trade.

Third, in line with the challenges faced by consumers who confront a wide variety of certification labels with various aims and criteria, I suggest that TransFair Canada develop a report which provides a detailed breakdown of various competing ‘ethical’ certification initiatives, and their affiliated guidelines, in order to provide clarity for consumers of the benefits of choosing to purchase a FT certified product in contrast to other certification initiatives (for example, Starbucks’ C.A.F.E. line, or the Ethical Tea Partnership). However, related to this, as I suggest above, some interviewees are engaged in “fairly traded” exchanges outside of the FT

certification process. As well, in relation to Martyn's discussion of Fair Trade Plus, certainly, in terms of the financial aspect, the producers were receiving more than the FT floor price, so that is one indication that this may be a better deal for producers, who are, after all, are the supposed primary beneficiaries of such trade. As noted, I do not deny that such exchanges can provide beneficial results for all parties and such exchanges that fall outside of the scope of FT raise questions about what types of farmers are invited to participate in FT and those who are excluded (e.g. coffee estates versus small producers). In this regard, I think it is important for TransFair Canada and FLO to continue to be open to revisiting and refining their rules to ensure that the needs of producers involved in the FT certification program are being met. As well, it is important to address how to include producers of "lower-quality products", for instance, which "involves building on and greatly accentuating the expansive ethics of care that inhabit fair trade to include those that have not been at the core of these networks" (Goodman 2004:910).

Fourth, some interviewees suggest that they would be interested to know how their licensing fees are actually spent, so perhaps TransFair could address this concern.

Fifth, in relation to the experience of some interviewees, the re-design of the TransFair website has not been beneficial so perhaps these concerns could be addressed.

Sixth, it was made clear to me by some interviewees that the great amount of detail required on the reports that must be submitted by licensees is extremely time-consuming. Perhaps the amount and type of detail required on these reports could be discussed and reviewed at the AGM to see if there is any way to still gain the important breakdown of information that TransFair is in search and perhaps lessen the time that licensees must spend preparing this information.



Finally, I think it is important that FLO consider putting an end to, or phasing out, the requirement that producer groups must pay fees in order to become FT certified as this appears to deter from the movement's impetus of addressing the poverty of Southern producers. As discussed above, such fees were paid by Northern importers prior to 2004, so perhaps this policy could be re-instituted.

### **For Fair Trade Activists**

Following are a few suggestions for activists as it relates to FT and policy recommendations. First, it is important that FT activists and advocates (local, regional, national, and transnational) maintain open lines of communication about various successes and challenges faced through involvement with FT. Such sharing contributes to a sense of solidarity and the recognition that you are 'part of something bigger' than yourself. Certainly, I think that the Canadian Fair Trade Network's (CFTN) website and listserv and the affiliated Canadian Student Fair Trade Network's listserv provide a crucial space for collaboration, announcements, challenging discussions, support, education, and strategies for expanding the FT movement and market, both within Canada and beyond. Transnational solidarity is of crucial importance in order to continue to expand the movement; not only between Southern producers and Northern consumers, but also between FT activists globally. When such issues are discussed transnationally there is a greater potential for social change because there are more people involved. As well, conference sessions and a symposium have provided necessary time for constructive discussions between people involved with FT (CFTN 2004).

Second, corporate participation in FT is beneficial in the sense that these large retailers buy a large amount of coffee and as such have the potential to assist a great many farmers. While it is important for activists and consumers to be critical of and monitor the actions of

corporations who offer a line of FT coffee alongside many non-FT coffees, it is also a positive achievement for producers involved in FT when corporations are pressured to respond to public demand by offering FT coffee. However, as discussed, the support of FT by corporations such as Proctor & Gamble and Sara Lee, and neoliberal institutions such as the World Bank must be examined very closely, argues Fridell (2004a:154) as “[s]upport for fair trade by these neoliberal institutions amounts to them giving with one hand while they continue to take with another, significantly larger hand.” In relation to this, is the issue of power. Powerful corporate players have the potential to undermine the socially just aims of the movement. As such, while it is important for FT activists to work to expand the FT market, we must be careful when pressuring large corporate participants to offer FT coffee (or other products) as a choice (or encouraging a switch to all FT), that the social justice aims of the FT movement are not undermined.

Third, and related to the above, is the importance of education through various means (media, public forums, events, etcetera) by activists which highlight the distinction between various certification initiatives in order to explain how and why the certification process provided by Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) and TransFair Canada (and the other international National Initiatives and FLO affiliates) provides a more comprehensive and socially just standard than do other certification initiatives that claim to be engaging in ‘ethical’ forms of trade.

Fourth, the FT movement and market is comprised of devoted and enthusiastic participants who work very hard to expand the variety (e.g. cotton) and availability (in various locations) of FT certified products. It is important to continue these efforts.

Fifth, TransFair Canada (2006) does ensure that licensees follow “terms of usage of the Fair Trade Certified logo on” FT products which helps to legitimize the logo. However, as

noted, according to some interviews, the logo can be misused. I suggest that FT activists and consumers check to see with TransFair Canada to ensure that a company is a licensee to ensure that they are legitimately selling FT.

Sixth, I think Jeremy's focus on worker co-operatives in the North is an extremely important point of focus for activists to focus on. Jeremy points out that FT represents a "contradiction" in the sense that the rules that Southern FT producers must comply by do not also have to be followed by those in the North (i.e. businesses do not have to be socially just organizations and/or co-ops to simply sell FT coffee, for instance). I urge all activists to advocate for a more expansive FT movement because, as Jeremy suggests, it is important "to make transformations in our economy here in the same way that they *are* transforming their economies in the South with Fair Trade."

Finally, I encourage the continued proliferation of developing Fair Trade policies within institutional settings such as universities and schools, as well as municipalities, communities, and cities, as well as campaigns to encourage ethical consumption (such as the CFTN and other organizations campaign that linked the consumption of FT chocolate to Halloween, for instance).

## Further Research

Reinharz notes that “we not only ‘*bring* the self to the field . . . [we also] *create* the self in the field” (quoted in Lincoln and Guba 2000:183). My perspective on FT became greatly nuanced throughout this research. Knowledge is a process—no work/research is every fully complete, just as the struggle for social justice does not end. This research has made it abundantly clear that there are numerous aspects of FT yet to be studied, and others to be studied in more depth. For instance, I find Young’s (2003, 2004) discussion of “political responsibility” versus “liability” helpful in that she emphasizes the benefit of people taking collective political responsibility and looking toward correcting structural injustices as opposed to blaming individuals for past wrongs and creating unnecessary antagonism between individuals. While these writings are related to sweatshops and the clothing industry her general argument is applicable to the Fair Trade movement. Young’s framework explains that acknowledging our complicity in structural injustice as Northern consumers does not mean, however, that we should assign blame entirely on us as individual consumers. Rather, in Young’s analysis, “political responsibility” is a collective effort in which corporate and other institutions, as well as the actions of individuals, are deemed worthy of change.

While an in-depth examination of commodity chain analysis of the coffee market was not the focus of my research, as I was more interested in the qualitative dynamics of participation in Fair Trade, certainly such literature (Ponte 2002a, 2002b; Taylor 2005) would enhance further work. Referring to the work of Gereffi (1994), as Taylor (2005:130) points out, there is a notable distinction between “producer-driven” and “buyer-driven” chains. Although the terminology seems to suggest otherwise, producer-driven chains are related to “automobile, aircraft and other capital and technology intensive industries in which transnational corporations

(TNCs) and other large integrated enterprises play a central role in controlling the production system.” Coffee, on the other hand, is related to buyer-driven chains in the sense that “large retailers, brand-name merchandisers and other trading companies organize decentralized production networks in exporting countries typically in the global south.” As well, referring to the work of Renard (1999, 2003) and Ponte (2002:1111), Taylor (2005:133-134) explains that while large corporate roasters have a strong foothold in much of the coffee industry, small coffee roasters “represent ‘interstices’ in the globalized market where small-scale producers can enter under more favorable conditions.” Referring to the work of Fitter and Kaplinsky (2001:12) and Giovannucci (2001), Taylor (2005:133-134) explains that such small roasters have expanded due to the specialty coffee market because as a result of their “more direct access to consumers, specialty coffee roasters have been most open to providing niches for ‘sustainable’ coffees such as Fair Trade, organic and shade grown products.”

I’d also be interested in using more of the economic geography literature on ethical and political consumption by Goodman (2004), as well as Goodman and Goodman (2001). I do believe that FT could promote, and likely will require, greater political involvement and collective efforts for continued expansion of the movement, as opposed to *just* relying on the choice of individuals who choose to purchase an ethical product. Goodman (2004:892) refers to “the ethically- and politically-charged grocery line” and explains that “creating more transformative food systems in fair trade networks can only go so far economically and politically, shackled as it is to the changing whims of the consumer market” (909). As such, FT must be connected to the political realm and education, awareness-raising, and collective discussion and efforts are essential to explaining how FT is a stepping stone to examining broader problems with the organization of the economy (Hudson and Hudson 2003, 2004). As

Goodman (910) asks: “exactly how far is fair trade penetrating into the consciousness of consumers and in what ways can the moral economies of fair trade be extended to include other alternative and conventional commodity networks?” In light of this, Goodman (910) emphasizes that “fair trade must become more politically and economically threatening.” He explains that “a re-centering of Northern identities around notions of global citizenship rather than those of a one-dimensional consumer” must become one of the aims of FT. In line with this, examination of the political realm would be a fruitful area of research. I explored this somewhat in relation to the issue of FT encouraging connections between consumers and producers, as this sense of solidarity, expressed by some interviewees as immensely important, is related to expanding their actions as an individual to a more inclusive understanding of what it means to be part of global human community.

In some interviews, the topic of a ‘fair wage’ for employees of businesses that sell FT products in the North arose. This would be interesting to explore in more detail as it relates to the benefit when discussions and activism surrounding FT are situated within a broad framework of a movement toward a more socially just organization of society for *all* humans in which exchange, production, and consumption provides the opportunity for all to thrive. Goodman (2004:910) addresses this point in suggesting that incorporating “coffee servers can and should become a moral and politicized goal for fair trade.”

I believe also in the importance of more research on Fair Trade from the perspective of Southern producers—the supposed primary beneficiaries of Fair Trade.

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## **Appendix**

**DATE:** May 12, 2005

**FROM:** Linda Rose-Krasnor, Chair  
Research Ethics Board (REB)

**TO:** John Sorenson, Sociology  
Stacey BYRNE

**FILE:** 04-376 - BYRNE

**TITLE:** Benefits, Challenges, Limitations and Contradictions of Fair Trade as a Social Justice Movement

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

**DECISION:** Accepted as Clarified

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of **May 12, 2005 to September 30, 2005** subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance may be extended upon request. *The study may now proceed.*

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and approved by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. The Board must approve any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form **Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application**.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form *Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.



**Date:** Wed, 07 Sep 2005 12:20:55 -0400  
**From:** Research Ethics Board <reb@brocku.ca>  
**To:** sb04iy@badger.ac.brocku.ca, jsorenso@brocku.ca  
**Cc:** mowen@brocku.ca, linda rose-krasnor <rebchair@brocku.ca>  
**Subject:** REB 04-376 BYRNE - Modification Accepted

**FROM:** Linda Rose-Krasnor, Chair  
Research Ethics Board (REB)

**TO:** John Sorenson, Sociology  
Stacey BYRNE

**FILE:** 04-376 - BYRNE

**DATE:** September 7, 2005

**END DATE:** October 31, 2005

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the research proposal:

Benefits, Challenges, Limitations and Contradictions of Fair Trade as a  
Social Justice Movement

The Research Ethics Board finds that your modification request to an  
ongoing project involving human participants conforms to the Brock  
University guidelines set out for ethical research.

LRK/bb

Office of Research Ethics  
Brock University  
Office of Research Services  
500 Glenridge Avenue  
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1  
phone: (905)688-5550, ext. 3035 fax: (905)688-0748  
email: reb@brocku.ca  
<http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/ethics/humanethics/>

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returning the communication to reb@brocku.ca. I thank-you in advance for  
your co-operation and assistance.

**Date:** Thu, 27 Oct 2005 09:39:07 -0400  
**From:** Research Ethics Board <reb@brocku.ca>  
**To:** sb04iy@badger.ac.brocku.ca, jsorenso@brocku.ca  
**Cc:** mowen@brocku.ca, linda rose-krasnor <rebchair@brocku.ca>  
**Subject:** REB 04-376 BYRNE - Modification Accepted

**FROM:** Linda Rose-Krasnor, Chair  
Research Ethics Board (REB)

**TO:** John Sorenson, Sociology  
Stacey BYRNE

**FILE:** 04-376 - BYRNE

**DATE:** October 27, 2005

**END DATE:** April 30, 2006

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the research proposal:

Benefits, Challenges, Limitations and Contradictions of Fair Trade as a  
Social Justice Movement

The Research Ethics Board finds that your modification request to an  
ongoing project involving human participants conforms to the Brock  
University guidelines set out for ethical research.

LRK/bb

Brenda Brewster, Research Ethics Assistant  
Office of Research Ethics, MC D250A  
Brock University  
Office of Research Services  
500 Glenridge Avenue  
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1  
phone: (905)688-5550, ext. 3035 fax: (905)688-0748  
email: reb@brocku.ca  
<http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/ethics/humanethics/>

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read by or delivered to, any other person(s). Such communication or  
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returning the communication to reb@brocku.ca. I thank-you in advance for  
your co-operation and assistance.

## LETTER OF INFORMATION

**Title of Study:** Benefits, Challenges, Limitations, and Contradictions of Fair Trade as a Social Justice Movement

**Principal Investigator:** Stacey Byrne, Graduate Student, Department of Social Justice & Equity Studies,  
Brock University

**Faculty Supervisor:** John Sorenson, Professor, Department of Sociology, Brock University

You are invited to participate in an interview on your experience with fair trade. This interview study is being conducted as part of my thesis research which explores the issues faced by sellers, customers and/or advocates of fair trade. This project will also explore the connections between fair trade and other social justice issues. I hope to publish the results of this research in an academic journal.

I very much want to hear what you have to say, and hope you can spare me some time over the next few weeks or so. If you can help, I want to assure you that your participation is *completely voluntary*; you can end the interview process at any time.

My interviews will be conversational. I'll prepare a few general questions, and then explore the themes that emerge in conversation. Since I want to get a really solid understanding of people's experiences and perspectives, I expect the interviews to last about one to two hours each. I'm also hoping that my conversational partners will let me return to talk to them again, after I've had a chance to think over what I learned from them.

I realize I can offer little in return, except an opportunity to discuss an interesting topic.

This research study is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905.688.5550 ext 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca)).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you!

Stacey Byrne  
Graduate Student, MA SJES  
Phone: 905-688-4572  
Email: [sb04iy@brocku.ca](mailto:sb04iy@brocku.ca)

John Sorenson  
Sociology Professor, Brock University  
Phone: 905-688-5550 Ext 4369  
Email: [jsorenson@brocku.ca](mailto:jsorenson@brocku.ca)

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file# 04-376).

## WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

**Title of Study:** Benefits, Challenges, Limitations, and Contradictions of Fair Trade as a Social Justice Movement

**Principal Investigator:** Stacey Byrne, Graduate Student, Department of Social Justice & Equity Studies, Brock University

**Faculty Supervisor:** John Sorenson, Sociology Professor, Department of Sociology, Brock University

**Name of Participant (please print):** \_\_\_\_\_

### Dear Research Participant,

You are invited to participate in an interview on your experience with fair trade. This interview study is being conducted as part of my thesis research which explores the issues faced by sellers, customers and/or advocates of fair trade. This project will also explore the connections between fair trade and other social justice issues. I hope to publish the results of this research in an academic journal.

Our interviews will be conversational. I'll prepare a few general questions and then explore the themes that emerge in conversation. You are being invited to participate in two (up to three) semi-structured, informal, open-ended, in-depth interviews over a period of a few weeks or so. More than one interview is required for this study because I want to get a really solid understanding of people's experiences and perspectives. I expect the interviews to last about one to two hours each. I'm hoping that you will let me return to talk to you again, after I've had a chance to think over what I've learned from you. I realize that I can offer little in return, except an opportunity to discuss an interesting topic.

I want to assure you that your participation is *completely voluntary*; you can end the interview process at any time, and you do not have to respond to any questions you do not wish to answer. While tape recording and taking notes will help me remember accurately, I *won't tape or take notes without your permission*. I'll also keep all records (i.e. tapes, transcripts, and notes) in a *secure* place, and won't put your name on them. All audio-tapes and paper records will be destroyed when the project is complete in April 2006. I'll *share my records only with my Supervisor*. When I write my thesis, I'll *use pseudonyms* rather than personal names.

Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records. Feedback about the use of the data generated through interviews will be available in April 2006, from Stacey Byrne, the principal researcher for this project. If the study is published, you will be notified. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada is sponsoring this research. If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca).

*Thank you for your participation in this study!*

I \_\_\_\_\_,

1. Have read and understand the relevant information regarding this research project
2. Understand that I may ask questions in the future
3. Indicate consent to research participation by signing this research consent form

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I have explained this study to the participant**

**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

Stacey Byrne, Principal Investigator  
MA SJES Student, Brock University  
Phone: 905-688-4572  
Email: sb04iy@brocku.ca

John Sorenson, Faculty Supervisor  
Sociology Professor, Brock University  
Phone: 905-688-5550 Ext. 4369  
Email: jsorenso@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file# 04-376).

## **Interview Questions/Topics of Discussion**

1. How did you become involved with fair trade? How did you find out about fair trade?
2. Why is it worthwhile to be involved with fair trade?  
(i.e. As an individual? For your community? For North America? The world?)
3. What kinds of long term goals do you foresee in relation to your involvement with fair trade?
4. What kinds of challenges do you encounter because of your involvement with fair trade?  
What are some of the downfalls and/or limitations of being involved with fair trade?
5. Do you see fair trade as connected to any other issues of social justice?
6. How does your involvement with fair trade influence how you think about other products that you purchase?

## LETTER OF APPRECIATION

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your participation in the research project, "Benefits, Challenges, Limitations, and Contradictions of Fair Trade as a Social Justice Movement." As you are aware, this research project is being conducted by Stacey Byrne, a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Social Justice & Equity Studies program at Brock University as part of my thesis research on fair trade.

Your participation has been *essential* to my understanding of how customers, sellers, and/or advocates of fair trade deal with both the positive aspects and difficulties as a result of involvement with and interest in fair trade.

Feedback about the use of the data generated through interviews will be available in April 2006, from Stacey Byrne, the principal researcher for this project. A written explanation will be provided for you upon your request. If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca).

Thank you again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Stacey Byrne, Principal Investigator  
MA SJES Student, Brock University  
Phone: 905-688-4572  
Email: sb04iy@brocku.ca

John Sorenson, Faculty Supervisor  
Sociology Professor, Brock University  
Phone: 905-688-5550 Ext. 4369  
Email: jsorenson@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file# 04-376).

### List of Interviewees and their Roles in Relation to Fair Trade<sup>1</sup>

<b>List of Interviewees (by Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Role in Relation to Fair Trade</b>
Haley	Retailer of coffee (100% is FT); consumer of FT coffee that she sells; recently found out about FT tea, sugar, and cocoa
Donna & Jim	Retailer, wholesaler (and roaster) of coffee; about 50% of the coffee is FT. Retailer and wholesaler of chocolate (recently became FT certified)
Ricki	Retailer, wholesaler & manufacturer (i.e. roaster) of coffee; 75-80% of coffee is FT; will soon sell FT tea
Jasmine	Retailer, wholesaler (and roaster) of coffee; sells approx. 5-6 FT coffees as an option (i.e. always available for customers); in process of obtaining FT tea to sell
Martyn	FT activist and consumer of FT products
Jake	Retailer, wholesaler, importer & distributor of FT coffee (green/raw and roasted); 90-95% is FT; plans to sell other products such as FT chocolate and tea, but primarily interested in coffee industry; consumer of FT products
Simon	FT activist and consumer of FT products; uses the term “critical social pedagogue” to self-identify
Jeremy	Retailer, wholesaler (and roaster) of FT coffee (100% is FT); retails FT tea, sugar, and chocolate products; consumer of FT products; self-identifies as a “practitioner” (this identity incorporates all his roles in relation to FT, including activism)

<sup>1</sup> This table provides a brief summary. Additional details are included in the *List of Interviewees* in **Chapter One**

## **Forced & Child Labour**

Direct words from the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International website (FLO 2005g:20):

### **4.1 Forced Labour and Child Labour**

*FLO follows ILO Conventions 29, 105, 138 and 182 on child labour and forced labour. Forced or bonded labour must not occur. Bonded labour can be the result of forms of indebtedness of workers to the company or middlemen. Children may only work if their education is not jeopardised. If children work, they must not execute tasks, which are especially hazardous for them due to their age.*

#### **4.1.1 Minimum requirements**

4.1.1.1 Forced labour, including bonded or involuntary prison labour, does not occur.

4.1.1.2 Children are not employed (contracted) below the age of 15.

4.1.1.3 Working does not jeopardise schooling or the social, moral or physical development of the young person.

4.1.1.4 The minimum age of admission to any type of work which by its nature or the circumstances under which it is carried out, is likely to jeopardise the health, safety or morals of young people, shall not be less than 18 years.